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A Light Unto My Path.



E. J. WHATELY.



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A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH.

A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH:

OR,

*THE NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE ASPECTS
OF BIBLE TEACHING.*

BY

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"HOW TO ANSWER OBJECTIONS TO REVEALED RELIGION," "THE
GOSPEL IN BOHEMIA," ETC.

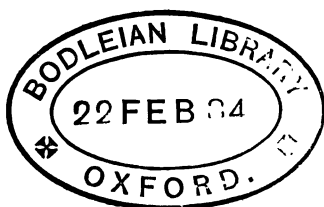
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INTRODUCTION.

IN a stereoscopic view, to enable the spectators to see the object depicted as in nature, two sun-pictures are taken—one for the *positive*, the other for the *negative* side ; and the two views combined give the full and complete picture.

Something like this process is needed to give us a clear and perfect comprehension of those Scripture precepts which are to be the “lamp to our feet” and the “light to our path.” We cannot take their meaning in all its depth and breadth without viewing both sides, as it were. We must examine the negative precepts, showing what the true servant of God must *avoid*, and the positive precepts, showing what he must *do* ; and by comparing them together, we shall see what positive commands are included in the prohibitions, and what prohibitions in the commands ; for each takes in the other side. Just as, in studying the promises, we cannot fully enter into the force of “No condemnation,” unless we have realized in some measure the state of the unpardoned sinner, (and the like in

other cases),—so, in viewing the precepts, we must turn them on the other side, as it were, to take in their full meaning. Thus, "abhorring what is evil" must imply "cleaving to that which is good;" and true Christian love must be that which "worketh no ill" to our neighbour.

And only by so viewing God's commands and prohibitions on every side and in every light—as we might contemplate a magnificent edifice from the front and the back, from above and below—only thus can we truly estimate their fulness and true meaning. Every Scripture precept and promise needs to be *polarised*, as it were, to be rightly comprehended.

It may be useful and helpful perhaps to some Bible students to take a few of these negative and positive precepts and examine them in detail; and the line of study thus indicated may then be further carried on by each individually—thus enabling us to dig even deeper in the mine of exhaustless treasures we shall find in the Word of God.

PART I.

The Negative Side.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

WE will begin by examining some of the prohibitory mandates in that first great code of laws, written by the Divine Hand on the tables of stone and uttered among the thunders of Sinai. We are familiar with these sacred words from infancy; but do we always realize their full import?

Some of us, perhaps, are ready thoughtlessly to echo the words of the young ruler, as regards the *letter* of the law—"All these things have I kept from my youth up."

Others have gone so far as to say that an enlightened Christian needs no law but the law of love, and that for him these plain precepts are useless.

Love indeed is the *fulfilling* of the law, and

perfect love to God and man would comprehend all its requirements; but ignorant human beings like ourselves, even if the Holy Spirit has shed something of that divine love in their hearts, need to be instructed and guided where to walk and what to avoid. The precepts of the Decalogue are like mighty beacons which point out the rocks where we may split, the directions in which we must be specially and constantly on our guard, if we would keep clear of all that displeases our Maker and Redeemer.

But if we would truly use these precepts as safeguards, we must learn to understand their depth and breadth. And much of the first part of the Sermon on the Mount is given us to meet this want. The Lord first, as if to anticipate the heresy of later times, insists that He was "not come to destroy, but to fulfil," and denounces solemnly all who would omit even the least of God's commandments. He then proceeds to point out how greatly the teachers of the law had overlooked the fulness and depth of meaning in these commandments; and He selects three,—the sixth, the seventh, and the third,—of which He treats in detail, thus tracing for us a path which may guide us in judging of the other precepts of the Law of God, and furnishing, as it were, a *key* to the whole.

Perhaps it may be a help to some of us to try and consider more closely, on the plan thus marked out for us by our Divine Teacher, the lessons to be learned from some of these great precepts, that we may see how, in our own day, we may be led, if not on the watch, to infringe them in letter or in spirit.

We will begin with the two first,—those directed respectively against a plurality of gods, and against an unauthorised manner of approaching the true God.

But these two are precisely the ones which, as Protestant Christians, we may be inclined to think ourselves exempt from the danger of transgressing, — except as far as excessive attachment to an earthly object may be regarded as violating their spirit.

On this last point we shall speak further afterwards ; but first, may we not ask if it is quite certain we are even safe from all possibility of violating the *letter* of these commandments ?

“Surely none but the heathen can break the letter of the first,” many will reply.

But let us consider a little more carefully what is implied in the “letter.” Have we not sometimes, in reading of the frequent lapses of the Israelites into idolatry, wondered how those who had had such striking proofs of their

Creator's power could ever be tempted, even for a moment, to forsake Him for other gods?

Their sin was indeed heavy and great; but there is no reason to suppose that they ever thought of renouncing their belief in Him as their Creator.

We are so accustomed to associate the ideas of "God" and "Creator" together, that we often view them as inseparable. But we have only to open a book of mythology of any country, to see that they were not even generally connected together in the view of the heathens. None of these ever thought their gods made the world; on the contrary, they had legends of the birth and origin of those very gods. By "gods" they meant simply invisible beings superior to man; and in "worship" they included any sort of offering or mark of respect or attention.

Their belief was, in fact, very like the belief in fairies, goblins, etc., which was common formerly among the uneducated in many countries; and the offerings made to these imaginary beings answered to the service rendered to the gods of the heathens.*

The sin of the Israelites did not consist in *believing in the existence* of these invisible beings,

* See Archbishop Whately's "Lessons on Religious Worship."

—for *that* many of the early Christians did, as we see by the Epistles to the Corinthians, and they are not blamed for it; the sin of the Israelites was in *taking them for their gods*, that is, paying them worship and reverence.

The object of the First Commandment is to point out that the supreme God alone must be the object of *worship*; and that any attempt to communicate with, or make offerings to, invisible beings besides Himself, is high treason to our Heavenly King. It would be no sin for an ignorant Scottish or Irish or Scandinavian peasant to believe in the existence of “the good people,” or the “hill folk,” as he would call them; he might have no means of knowing any better; but it would be a sin for him, as a worshipper of the true God, to make offerings to please these beings, as was so often the practice formerly.

And this is the sin involved in the invocation of the saints and angels, and of the Virgin Mary, by the Romanists and followers of other unreformed Churches.

It is sometimes thought a want of charity to affirm this; but there is no charity in ignoring a truth God has seen fit to inculcate. We cannot be too tender or too merciful to *individuals*, who have often many excuses, and who may in-

deed have had no opportunity of being better instructed ; but there is no charity or tenderness in trying to make out that God's commands are not disobeyed, in the face of plain proof to the contrary ; and it may well be doubted whether we shall ever lead a *really* devout worshipper of the Virgin and saints to look to Christ alone, without distinctly pointing out to him, that to have other objects of worship (even if they are only called mediators, and their worship of an inferior order) besides the one true God, is against His express command.

Certain it is that wherever the Virgin, or a saint or angel, occupies a prominent place in the thoughts and affections, the love of Christ will be found to die away. All who know much of Romanists in Ireland and other Roman Catholic countries know that He is regarded habitually by them either as a babe in His mother's arms, or as a stern and harsh judge, leaving all love and tenderness to that mother, and representing *only* justice, as she, on the other hand, does mercy. And it will be found that in all countries and all forms of religion, the worship of the Creator fades away under the blighting influence of the worship of other deities.

They are acknowledged to be inferior ; but for that very reason man likes better to hold

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

communication with those less far removed from himself, and able, as he thinks, to sympathise with him more fully; and gradually the adoration of the supreme God is first neglected, then ignored, and finally forgotten.

“But is this practical for us?” one will ask. “We are not likely to become Romanists.”

In days when Romanism and semi-Romanism are so prevalent, it would be a bold thing to say that none of us, or those we care for, may be exposed to such a danger.*

But there is another kind of intercourse with the invisible world, which is widely spreading in some circles, though to others it may happily be nearly unknown—namely, what is commonly called *Spiritualism*, or an attempt to communicate with the spirits of the departed.

Now, whether the attempt can really be carried out, or whether the curious phenomena produced be merely the result of juggling tricks, or elaborate scientific apparatus, or of some power in nature not fully understood, is a question which does not concern us here, and had better be left to those more qualified to search

* Almost all the peculiar Romish errors, as has been well remarked, are to be found among Protestants in a state of fusion, or floating like gases in the air. In the Church of Rome they are found in a tangible state.

into it. Even if it could be decidedly ascertained beyond the reach of a doubt, it would be beside the mark ; for the question we have to consider is not whether it is *possible*, but whether it is *lawful*. It is the intention, as we all know, that makes the sin ; and it does seem very clear that the First Commandment is broken by any attempt to hold communication with any invisible being except our Creator.

It is noteworthy that whenever witchcraft (or intercourse with familiar spirits) or necromancy (or intercourse with the dead) is mentioned in Scripture, it is always in close connection with idolatry, as a kindred sin. (*See* Deut. xviii. 11, 14 ; Isa. viii. 19, 20 ; Gal v. 20 ; Rev. xxi. 8.)

It may be that some will think this a needless warning. If it is proved so, we could but be deeply thankful. But such temptations are rife at the present time, and they are sometimes presented to Christian persons at a time when they have been felt most powerfully ; perhaps just when a dear one has been taken from earth, and the poor heart is hungering and thirsting for a word or a sign to break the terrible silence between those who once "took sweet counsel together," and whose hearts were ever open to each other.

Then the Spiritualist "medium" comes forward and offers the means of gratifying the longing ;

he declares, perhaps, that *he* has nothing to do with infidel views, whatever others may—and he can bring beautiful and pious words of exhortation from departed spirits. This is no imaginary picture. The temptation has been offered to Christian mourners, and some have yielded and listened to the tempting voice, and entered the dangerous path.

That temptation can only be combated by the words—"IT IS FORBIDDEN." We are to have no communications with other gods, whether we call them by the name of gods or by the less alarming one of "spirits." Let it content us that our loved ones who have died in the Lord are with Him, and that He has the keys where our treasures are kept safe, and waiting to join us in the happy day of the great gathering together with the Lord. Meantime, what we have to do is to learn the lesson of patient waiting.

"Take it on trust a little while,
Soon shalt thou read the mystery right
In the full sunshine of His smile."

We have spoken so far of breaking the First Commandment in the *letter*. But there is a way of breaking it in the spirit also; and the temptation to do so is in our day the most frequent. For one who may be tempted by Romanism or

Spiritualism, hundreds will be in danger of yet more insidious "idols."

But there is a good deal of misapprehension on this point. Many seem to think that warm affection for any human being is breaking the commandment in spirit; and if they see any one fondly attached, for example, to a child, a friend, a husband, or wife, they will immediately warn them to take care and not "make an idol," "for God will assuredly take it away."

The exhortation will often lead the person so warned to try, as it were, to *cut down* his affection to what he thinks a safe point of moderation—a process more likely to cool the love to God than that to man. Or he will love under a continual sense of distrust and fear; and this leads to the feeling, so general in all countries and under all forms of religion, that God will take away anything we care very much for, unless we try to pretend that we are indifferent to it; and men make vain efforts to hide their love for what in their hearts they most prize, for fear God should take it from them as soon as He sees they cling to it!

But such feelings are worthy only the worshippers of an evil and cruel power, like the "evil eye" believed in in so many countries. Can we really believe that our Heavenly Father gave us

our affections only to crush them ? No—"if one love not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen ?" Can He who wept with the sisters of Lazarus be ready to condemn human love ?

The spirit of the First Commandment is not violated by loving ever so intensely ; its violation consists in making our *first object*, rendering our highest service to, any one but God. If a mother neglects in any way her duty to Him from love to her child ; if a friend thinks more of pleasing his friend than of serving God, or will allow something he knows to be wrong for fear of displeasing the object of his love,—then such persons have made a god of that object ; and if they are real, though erring disciples, their Master may well find it needful in some way to "rebuke and chasten" His disobedient children. And the same if riches, power, or any other earthly pursuit is placed *before* our service to God. It is in this sense that covetousness is called by the Apostle "idolatry."

But many overlook the difference between a burst of excited feeling, and the guiding principle of our life. Christians sometimes torment themselves with the thought that they really do not love God as well as they love their dear ones, because they have not the rapturous feelings of

devotion which others have, or are supposed to have. But the real test is not the frames or feelings, but simply this question : If you were called on, as so many early Christians were, either to give up your child, or friend, or parent, or to renounce your Heavenly Master, would you hesitate to sacrifice all for Him, though it would break your heart ?

You may feel now as if you could not bear the pain, just as you may feel with regard to bodily torture ; but if your *will* would be to put HIS will first—if your desire is to be ready to bear all for Him—to be a "true-hearted, whole-hearted" servant of His,—you *do* really love Him best, and you need not fear loving others too well.

But one of the commonest ways of breaking the First Commandment in spirit, is by an excessive reverence and attachment to one who has "ministered" to us "in spiritual things"—some minister or Christian teacher or friend who has been the means either of converting, or of strengthening and comforting, or enlightening the soul. It is easy quite unwittingly to glide into a state of mind in which the channel is really more valued than the living water which flows through it. This temptation is peculiarly insidious, because it is so difficult to separate in our minds the love of

the one from the other—the delight in the healing draught from that in the cup which brought it us. We should, indeed, thank God for sometimes allowing us a staff to lean on ; but we can lean *hard* safely on none but Him alone ; the earthly prop, even the best, is like the reed “whereon if a man lean it will go into his hand and pierce it.” And the lesson is one which sometimes only such painful experience can fully teach.

And it is, perhaps, to guard against this danger that God seldom appoints the same help and guide to one of His people for very long together. We may all be called on at different times to help one another in turn, and the one who first presented the cup to us may one day receive again a draught of refreshing from our hand.

It matters little—we are only giving “the cup of cold water” from His living Fountain. When we receive it, let us render thankful love to the human channel as well as the divine source, and not try to restrain our love or joy in either. Only let us bring it all to God to sanctify, and continually ask Him not to let us forget His words, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and *Him only* shalt thou serve.”

CHAPTER II.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

AS the First Commandment is directed against holding communication with any invisible beings but our Creator, so the Second is against unauthorised modes of approaching the true God.

It is almost instinctive in human nature to assist its own efforts in approaching the unseen by outward and visible signs, which are supposed in some way to represent the God men worship; either by choosing some object in which the divinity is supposed to dwell, as the *fetish-worshippers* in Africa do, or by making some image, picture, or emblem which is to represent Him to the mind.

The all-seeing God was pleased to meet this desire by Himself appearing from time to time in certain forms to His chosen people. In the cloudy pillar and the flame of fire the Israelites had the outward manifestation of His presence ;

but they were not satisfied with these authorised symbols, and when their patience had been tired out by Moses' long absence on the mount, they framed for themselves another,—a golden calf, chosen probably from their remembrance of the sacred bulls worshipped in Egypt. They had evidently, at that time, no idea of going after *false* gods; their sin was, making an unauthorised symbolic representation of the *true* God.

That, too, was the “sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat,” when he erected the golden calves of Bethel. Wishing to keep the people from the visits to Jerusalem, which he thought would endanger the stability of his kingdom, he framed a substitute for the Temple worship in these golden calves. This sin must not be confounded with that of Ahab and others in going after Baal; *they* transgressed the *First* Commandment, Jeroboam and his followers the *Second*. And it is remarkable that one or two of the kings who were most resolutely opposed to the plurality of gods,—Jehu for example, who actually put down the worship of Baal with the sword,—still unscrupulously followed the worship of the golden calves at Bethel.*

The *letter* of this commandment is clearly

* See 2 Kings x. 29—31.

broken by the images and pictures used in worship by all the unreformed Churches. It is often alleged that a pious Romanist does not worship the actual crucifix—that is, he does not look on the cross or the image itself as a god, but only takes it to *assist* his devotions. But this is precisely what the Second Commandment forbids.* No one who made a graven image ever actually believed the piece of wood or stone or brass to be a deity in itself; but he looked on it as a representation or emblem of God, and bowed down to adore it as such, and from this the next step was easy, to believe that a divine spirit dwelt in the image.

It was in this spirit that the children of Israel burned incense to the brazen serpent. It was not that they believed the serpent to be their god; but they looked on it as a *symbol* of Him, and as such worshipped it; and Hezekiah showed how fully he had understood the spirit of the Second Commandment, when he had the courage to destroy what most would have clung to as a precious relic and valued memento of past mercies, rather than allow it to be a snare to the people.

* It is curious that many Romish Catechisms tacitly acknowledge this by leaving out the Second Commandment.

We may safely lay it down that the Second Commandment is infringed in spirit as soon as there is any tendency to look on an image or picture as a needful help to devotion.

But such a judgment has been objected to by writers who, either from mistaken charity or other reasons, seek to bridge over the gulf between Bible-reading Christians and Rome.

It is said that those who love to gaze on pictures of friends or of eminent men have no right to blame one who uses a picture of the Saviour, or an emblem of the Trinity, to aid them in devotion. The answer is, simply, that the commandment of God is that which constitutes the difference. He has not forbidden us to make or use pictures for pleasure or instruction;* but He *has* forbidden their use in worship. "Thou shalt not bow down to them, or worship them,"—these words are clear enough.

To divine foresight it was well known that man would naturally try to evade this commandment above all others. A love of symbolic ritual observances is a part of human nature; and no tendency is harder to eradicate. As soon as we get beyond the

* The Jewish and Moslem notion that this also was forbidden, is clearly a merely superstitious fancy.

repetition of prayer as a mere form—as soon as the desire is felt for a really devotional frame of mind—the temptation—unless God's Spirit is really teaching us to worship Him "in spirit and in truth"—will seldom be resisted, to seek the aid of some object of sight to help us in realising things unseen.

And not pictures and images only; the same may be said of the *use, in worship*, of any *symbols* not *distinctly authorised* in Scripture.

For, as has been said, the images were used first as symbols or representatives of God. The birds, beasts, and insects worshipped by the ancient Egyptians are supposed to have been chosen as symbols or emblems of certain attributes of the Creator, as strength, swiftness, etc.

Originally, perhaps, intelligent worshippers kept this in mind, and looked up to the Supreme Creator while they held the emblem before their eyes; but by degrees the true part of the worship was lost sight of, and the ignorant learned to pay reverence to the object itself, and forgot Him whom it symbolised. And thus the breaking of the Second Commandment led to the breaking of the First.*

* And it is remarkable and shows the strength of the tendency that even the *authorized* symbol of the Bread in the Lord's Supper has been so abused.

And if this is true, are not those breaking the command in spirit who encourage the use of the Ritualistic symbols in worship so much in vogue at the present day? Some will say, "If no false doctrine be preached, why object to the outward ritual? Why not look on it as a mere matter of taste, whether more or less of outward adornment be introduced into the Church service?"

As long as it is *merely* ornamental and has no symbolic signification, it may be regarded in this manner. Whether the coverings of a pulpit or reading-desk be velvet or cloth, whether the music be more or less elaborate, is a matter of taste or expediency, and its suitability may depend on the place and circumstances,* but as soon as anything symbolic is introduced as *part of the worship*—a light to represent the "Light of the World," for instance—or any other object to assist our devotions by representing heavenly things, we are then immediately touching on dangerous ground.

* This does not imply that these things are always matters of *indifference*. It *might* happen, conceivably, under certain particular circumstances, that a rich covering in a church, or elaborate music, would be quite unsuitable; but still it would not involve the same principle as a symbolic ceremonial.

It is true, creation is full of objects which by the Christian mind may be regarded justly as symbols of heavenly things; and our Lord's parables would sanction our so viewing them. The sight of the rising sun naturally reminds the Christian of the Sun of Righteousness; a spring gushing from the rocks recalls the fountain of living waters; the seeds growing up in the "blade and the ear," and the fields "white to harvest," must bring to mind the parables and comparisons of which our Lord's speech was so full. But this is quite different from the use of the symbols or emblems in our *worship*, for which we have no sanction.

There is no true charity in regarding all these symbolic observances as a matter of indifference, as things* which may be safely and harmlessly conformed to for the sake of peace. As soon as a principle is at stake, it becomes unsafe to yield.

The words of an eminent living writer, not treating of religious subjects as such, but only of the beliefs of various nations as a matter of curious inquiry, form so remarkable a confirmation of what has been said here, that we may venture to quote them. "Let those who wish to understand the hidden wisdom of those words (Exod. xx. 4, 5) study the history of ancient

religions. Let them read the descriptions of religious festivals in Africa, in America, in Australia; let them witness also the pomp and display in some of our own Christian churches and cathedrals. No arguments can prove that there is anything very wrong in all these outward signs and symbols. To many people, we know, they are even a help and comfort. But history is sometimes a stronger and sterner teacher than argument, and one of the lessons which the history of religions certainly teaches is this, that the curse pronounced against those who would change the invisible into the visible, the spiritual into the material, the divine into the human, the infinite into the finite, has come true in every nation on earth." *

This will explain to us why this commandment is dwelt on so much more at length, and is followed by so much more solemn and emphatic a denunciation, than any of the others. Let us take the lesson home and beware lest we be led in any sense to "follow after idols."

* Max Müller, "Chips from a German Workshop."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

WE are not purposing here to go through all of the precepts contained in the two tables. Three of them have been so fully treated of by our Lord Himself as to leave little to be added by others; and the subjects opened up by every one of these wonderful and simple words are too wide and too deep for discussion in the space before us. We will only make a few remarks on three out of the Second Table, which are, perhaps, oftener transgressed in spirit by those who believe themselves to be attentive to moral duties generally than most others. These three are, the Fifth, the Eighth, and the Ninth commandments.

And *first*, to speak of the FIFTH. It has been remarked by more than one writer and preacher that a laxity with respect to this commandment is one of the special characteristics of the present day. This does not imply

that undutiful and ungrateful conduct to parents in action is commoner than probably it has always been; but the tendency is to be observed, even in young people truly attached to their parents, to speak and behave to them habitually in a manner which, though unconscious and unintentional on their part, does certainly violate the spirit, if not the letter, of the Fifth Commandment.

To "honour" parents is, clearly, to have a deferential and respectful manner to them in the daily intercourse of life. And this is precisely what children at the present day are apt to omit. There was a time when the fault was on the opposite side, and the severity and repression with which young people were treated by their parents were such as to destroy the affectionate confidence which should exist in the relation between them. No one could wish to see the state of things revived in which a son or daughter dared not sit in their parents' presence, or speak unless addressed.

But the reaction from this unnatural restraint, as often happens, has led to great evils on the opposite side, and evils which are certainly more directly opposed to God's commands. Tyranny has been followed, in many cases, by anarchy; and when we hear young persons

addressing a parent in the tone in which they might speak to a companion of their own age with whom they were on ultra-familiar terms of "free-and-easy" intercourse,—contradict them to their faces, laugh at their opinions, insist on following their own way in direct opposition to the parent's wishes, or speak contemptuously of them to others,—can we say they are "honouring" their parents?

It may be that some young persons are really tried by differences of opinion and feeling, which partly arise from their having received a superior education to their parents. But we would ask those who are so situated, "Is it your part to slight those parents who have taken pains, perhaps at great personal sacrifice, to obtain for you advantages which were out of their reach in *their* youth, and make them feel the mortifying sense of inferiority more keenly than they *must* feel it at all events?"

"Oh, but they don't mind it," some will say. Do not be too sure of that. The young are apt to take for granted too hastily that the feelings get blunted as we grow older. On some points they are more intense than when we were younger and had more elasticity and freshness. And the young form a much greater part of the happiness of the old—and therefore have much

more power of giving them pain—than they will ever be able to conceive till they begin to be advanced in life themselves. They have little idea how their careless words can inflict pain—pain which the parent often conceals for fear of alienating his child by its outward manifestation, but which is none the less felt for being borne in silence. The time will come, if you live, when you may know this by experience, and when the idle words you have spoken to those who have passed out of reach of your love and sorrow will come back to you with a sharp sting. Do not wait for death to teach you the sad lesson. “Let Love antedate Death’s work, and do it now.”*

But you may be unhappy enough to have parents who are not merely removed from you in point of education, but in more important matters still—to whom you cannot look up, morally, as to those who can be respected.

But the command remains the same. “Honour,” in this sense, does not signify a *feeling* of admiration or esteem, but simply the rendering of due outward respect; as we are bidden to “Honour the king.” And this is a plain duty, even to an unworthy parent.

But there are young Christians who are

* Mrs. Charles.

tempted to break the spirit of this commandment, not in the ways we have alluded to, but from their own deep religious convictions, carried out in a mistaken way. They have, perhaps, parents who do not share the "blessed hope" they have themselves embraced. They long to impart the good things they have received, and in their zeal and eagerness they are sometimes led to speak to their elders in a tone which might be very properly used to a child they were teaching in a Sunday school, but which does not befit the relation between a child and a parent, or, indeed, between a young person and an elder one.

Some very well-intentioned tales for the young have done harm in this way by representing a young person as, we may almost say, *lecturing* a father or mother in a way which, in real life, would certainly irritate much more than it could profit the hearer, and which the elder person would be quite justified in stigmatising as impertinent and uncalled for.

"But should I never speak of my convictions to my parents or older friends?" a young and ardent Christian will ask.

Not so. There are times and places in which it may be done fittingly, doubtless; but, in general, a young person's way of doing good

to parents and elders is more like that which the Apostle Peter pointed out to the believing wives of husbands opposed to the truth (1 Pet. iii. 1): "If any obey not the word, they also may without the word" (or, as it is rendered by the best annotators, "*without talking*") "be won by the conversation" (or, as we should now render it, the general conduct and demeanour) "of the wives." Reading it in this way, we see that the Apostle wished wives to influence their husbands, not by words, but by the silent influence of a holy life. And how much more, then, young people with their parents or others placed over them.

Let your elders see, then, that your religion makes your life and conduct what it should be. Your business is to make Christianity lovely and attractive to those who know not its power. I know the task will not be always an easy one. If they are really opposed to true religion, they will lay all your good conduct to your natural character, and all your failures to your belief. You must be prepared for this, and have patience and lay it all before the Lord. He will enable you to live down this opposition, and show whose servant you are, if you are trying to serve Him with a single eye.

But nothing short of this will stand the trial of opposition. The "untempered mortar" of mere excitement, and vanity, and self-seeking, will go to the ground at the first shock.

Be ready to please your parents and friends in all things which are not against your conscience, even at the expense of your own personal inclinations and tastes: but be slow in speaking of your convictions to them unless distinctly called on to do so, and then speak very gently and humbly, and avoid any expressions which would seem to imply that you are sitting in judgment on others, and especially your elders.

This last is too often hastily done by young people who are earnestly and sincerely pious, and who hastily conclude their parents are of those who "obey not the word," merely because they have a different manner of expressing themselves, and less marked outward demonstrations of religious conviction.

For instance, the younger members of a family may have been powerfully impressed in some earnest "revival" movement, and have received real and great blessing from special mission services, meetings for prayer and inquiry, etc. Their mother, perhaps, is a reserved, silent Christian of the old school, accustomed to

exclusively secret and solitary devotion, and ready to take fright at a movement which is new and strange, and therefore uncongenial to her.

If her children would make allowance for these prejudices, and would win her sympathies by affectionate deference, she might learn to appreciate the advantages of what at first had repelled her; she would be strengthened and brightened by the warmth of her young companions, while her sober experience would benefit them no less. But instead of this, the young people hastily take for granted that she is not one with them in any way, and speak to and of her in a manner which causes her to shrink back into herself, and widens the gulf between them.

If they would only seek to act up to the spirit of the Fifth Commandment, they would find that a true friend and ally, instead of an opponent, was beside them, with whom they might take sweet and profitable counsel, and gain much blessing.

And what is said of parents applies equally to those who are in any sense in a parent's place—teachers, elder relatives, guardians, employers, etc. Let the young Christian seek to cultivate the graces of a "meek and quiet

spirit" in addressing all these; and though the special *temporal* blessing was evidently meant for the Israelites in Canaan, we may be sure that a blessing will always be realised by those who seek to carry out the spirit of this command, and, in the words of the wise man, "to rise up before the hoary head."

CHAPTER IV.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

IN treating of the Eighth Commandment we are met at the outset by a difficulty. It is generally supposed to concern only either the openly criminal class, or those whose position may place them in circumstances which tempt them to an actual abstraction of their neighbour's property.

But we are treating, not of the letter only, but of the *spirit* of the commandments. In this point of view the Eighth Commandment must surely include, not merely openly laying hands on what belongs to another, but in any way taking unfair advantage of him in respect of what is his, whether it be personal property, time, strength, skill, etc. In short, we can only observe the commandment in its full meaning by respecting all that belongs to our neighbour as we do our own.

Do we all of us—even those who profess, and that sincerely, to act on Christian motives—act

fully up to this precept? Are there not many common transactions of daily life in which we are tempted to forget it?

For example, we have to let, or to hire, a house; are we never tempted, in the matter of repairs, damages, arrears of rent, etc., to claim more, or withhold more, from our tenant on the one hand, or our landlord on the other, than is fairly and justly due?

Some of us, it is to be feared, can call to mind instances of most unfair dealing on such points, and, alas! even sometimes from those who made high professions of piety, and were eager in promoting charitable works. But it is often easier to be generous than just.

Then, again, in respect to the relation of employers and employed: are we always fair in our dealings with those who work for us? do we never yield to the temptation to press for the largest possible amount of work to be done or the smallest possible remuneration? do we never take advantage of the position of those we employ, if they are in any sort in our power, to make terms which are favourable to ourselves at their expense?

Or, again, as to payment of what is due: do we never allow ourselves to postpone the settling of our bills, and compel some poor

tradesman or workman to wait long, and perhaps suffer hardship, because we have chosen thoughtlessly to incur expenses we were unable to meet?

Or, again, if our relations to our neighbours is chiefly that of the employed towards the employer : are not those engaged in business sometimes tempted to pass off an article for a price beyond its real value, or to conceal some flaw or defect in order to dispose of it profitably?

This, again, is breaking in spirit the Eighth Commandment. It is an endeavour to obtain from our neighbour what is not justly ours to gain.

Many young persons, trying to serve God, have been exposed to painful temptations in these respects—blamed, perhaps, by unscrupulous employers, and threatened with loss of their situations, for refusing to comply with the “tricks of trade.” Let such remember that they are really suffering for Christ in such a cause as truly as if they were persecuted for refusing to worship an idol; and let them be very sure, if they will be but faithful and brave, they will find the “reproach of Christ better than the treasures of Egypt.”

We need hardly allude to the painful facts which have been brought before us so specially

of late connected with business transactions—cases in which men have speculated with property not their own, and urged others to commit their little all to concerns which they well knew were insecure. When the crash comes, every one is loud in condemnation of the offenders, and if any of them have been professedly pious, the ungodly are ready to exclaim in unholy triumph, "And these are your *Christian* people!"

But while we, as Christians, mourn bitterly that our Master should be thus "wounded in the house of His friends," let us remember that these unhappy offenders did not fall into these depths of humiliation at once. There must have been a beginning, and perhaps a very small one—a temptation to go out of the straight path a *very* little way, from which, they thought, they could get back immediately.

But it is easier to deviate from the right path than to go back; one false step is not easily retraced. What cause we have to cry from our hearts, "Lead us not into temptation"!

But it is not only in these ways we are led to infringe the spirit of the Eighth Commandment.

The temptation meets us even in work carried on directly for God's cause. We are tempted, in collecting money for some important mission-

ary or charitable object, to make use of some unfair way of increasing our gains—to profit by a mistake, perhaps, which places money collected for a different purpose in our hands, and to appropriate it to our own special object, which, perhaps, we think a more important one, or more in need of help.

Such a case is not an imaginary one: these temptations do occur even where Christian people are working for noble objects. And those who are really exercising self-denial and manifesting generosity and liberality in their own way, may be so carried away by their intense eagerness for their work, as to forget that they can win no real blessing by going out of the straight path to promote its objects.

Do not let us say, "I can never be tempted to act in this way." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Let us pray that even in our holiest work we may be kept pure from these things; and rather let the noblest charity or mission, if it must be, fall to the ground, than have recourse to means that may swerve a hair's breadth from "the straight and narrow way" of strict justice to uphold it; so may we be enabled to keep a "conscience void of offence" before men, and to "adorn the doctrine" in all things.

CHAPTER V.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

THE Ninth is a Commandment in which our liability to fall is more obvious. Perhaps there is none more frequently infringed by those who do seek to lead Christian lives, because its commencements are so insidious, and a lapse into it can be made so imperceptibly.

We would not for the world say anything we *knew* to be false of our neighbour; but we are tempted very often to say what we do not certainly *know to be true*.

We make hasty inferences on insufficient grounds, and repeat them as if they were certainties: or we take up some report we have heard, perhaps not quite correctly, and pass it on to another, till at last the story, like a snow-ball (to quote the old proverb), gains something at each repetition, and at length the original teller would hardly know his own history again. Or we slightly colour some incident from a

desire, hardly acknowledged to ourselves, to give point to a story ; or say a thing half in jest and half in earnest, which is taken in full earnest by the hearer.

And it is in these ways that the character of an innocent person is often blackened, and "false witness" borne against him, without any one of those concerned having any mischievous intention.

And this kind of gossip is one from which true Christians are by no means exempt. Indeed, there is one way in which they are more liable to the temptation that even those utterly careless of religion. There is a tendency to interfere in their neighbour's concerns, which takes the form of Christian love, and especially of a sense of union with those who are one in faith and hope ; some persons seem to feel as if they had a kind of *family* right to blame their Christian brethren if they think them in the wrong, and to give their opinion freely about their affairs.

It may have been this tendency that the Apostle meant to notice when he spoke of some who were "bishops over others" (the literal rendering of the words translated "busy bodies in other men's matters" in 1 Peter iv. 15).

And such a tendency very soon leads to a

breach of the Ninth Commandment ; for it is nearly impossible to judge correctly in a case which we know only in part, which must generally happen when we attempt to decide on the concerns of others ; and we can seldom put our judgments into words without conveying a false impression to those we address. The more this kind of meddling, even with the best intentions, is discouraged, the better.

The disposition to "gossip" is a fertile source of all these evils ; and it will always be a snare to those who have active but imperfectly stored minds and lack of sufficient occupation. The love of acquiring useful knowledge, and the habit of speaking of *things* rather than persons, is the best *outward* safeguard ; but the *real* cure must be a spirit of true Christian love in the heart—the Holy Spirit ruling and directing our thoughts as well as words and actions. "Set a watch before my mouth and keep the door of my lips," should be our continual and earnest prayers, and so we shall be kept from breaking either in letter or spirit this commandment.

These are but suggestions—indications of the way in which we should study the spirit of these great and weighty precepts written by the hand of God. They may help those who desire to have His law written in their hearts to follow

up the subject each for himself; and when we join in the prayer, "Lord, incline our hearts to keep this law," we may be led to make it a real and earnest and heart-felt petition; that we may indeed have the Spirit of God so "shed abroad in our hearts" as to be able, more and more, to seek to act in the spirit of that concentration of all the commandments—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy soul, and thy strength, and thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself."

CHAPTER VI.

NEGATIVES TO BE FOUND IN THE FIRST PSALM.

THE next series of negative precepts to which we would call attention is to be found in this, the first of that wonderful series of sacred songs which sound every note by turns of hope, trust, sorrow, penitence, holy resolution, and patient faith, till at last the whole winds up with a grand burst of joyful praise.

And in this, the opening Psalm, the things which God's servant will avoid, are enumerated in a gradation; the wrong-doing takes three stages, "walking," "standing," and "sitting;" three successive steps on the downward path.

"Walking" is the first. Many will "walk" a little out of the right path, who would be afraid to stand or sit there. Jehoshaphat did so when he joined Ahaziah in his expedition to Ophir. He had been already warned against "helping the ungodly" (2 Chron. xix. 2), and seems to have

taken the warning in a right spirit from the description which follows of his zealous missionary work in the kingdom of Israel as well as Judah. But the temptation recurred ; the joint expedition to Ophir with Ahaziah to seek gold may have appeared different from an alliance for war, offensive and defensive. We know not what means were used to induce him thus to "walk in the ways of the ungodly ;" but we know that shameful failure was the result, and from the refusal we read of in 1 Kings xxii. 49, to let Ahaziah's servants join with his, it would seem that the lesson had been learned and remembered by the King.

But there is another downward step—the *standing* in the way of sinners." To "stand" would seem to mean persisting in a wrong course. Asa's conduct when he made a league with the King of Syria (2 Chron. xvi. 3—11) is a case in point. He did not, like his son, receive obediently the rebuke of the prophet, but punished him for his plain speaking, and possibly his "oppressing some of the people" may have been for their sympathy with the man of God. This was *standing* as well as walking on the wrong side.

The declension once begun, it is easy to fall lower and lower. Descent is easier than ascent ;

and the next downward step may be quickly reached—the *sitting* "in the seat of the scornful."

The position of sitting implies rest, abiding, taking up as it were a permanent position. And those who allow themselves to be in any sense "unequally yoked," very easily fall into this state. We may walk uneasily; we may stand doubtingly; but when we take our seat, it implies we have made up our minds to abide continually in the position we have chosen.

And let not Christians hastily exclaim, "This cannot happen with us." We may be kept by our position and surroundings from temptation to glaring open sins, such as the world itself condemns; but a deviation from the right paths which may be hardly noted by man's eye, may be to *us*, "walking in the counsel of the ungodly," or even "standing in the way of sinners."

Many who are diligent in attendance on means of grace and zealous in Christian work, forget the exceeding need for guarding against slips on the side of strict truth and uprightness—against want of fairness in dealing with others—against that subtle spirit of worldliness which may invade those even who lead what would be called very unworldly lives—against acquiescence in wrongdoing—against making ourselves in some sort a

party to what we know to be unjust in practice, or untrue in teaching, because we are afraid to speak out—against a hundred temptations, in short, from the *wiles* as well the fiery darts of the evil one, who is glad when he can lead one who professes religion to take lower ground in some way as to conduct.

Who is sufficient for these things? What can be our safeguard against walking, standing, or sitting in a way displeasing to God, and presenting a stumbling-block to the “little ones” who are just beginning to tread the heavenly path, and are kept back—how often!—and hindered in their course, by the inconsistencies of those who profess to be Christ’s faithful servants?

The next words of the Psalm show us what the true safeguard is: “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night.”

We are apt to take “meditation” as here described, to mean a certain time spent in contemplation of heavenly things; and this is often a difficulty to young Christians. But whatever may be the benefit of such exercises, this is not what is meant here. No one could literally spend day and night in contemplation. It is rather to live in such continual communion with God that the desire to please and serve Him is

the underlying thought ever in the heart, the moving spring of every action.

We see this constantly in earthly things. A busy working-man, whose whole time is absorbed in daily labour, may still have the thought of wife and children the deep and all-pervading sentiment which actuates all he does. The desire for their welfare and comfort will then be interwoven with his every thought and action. He may not be conscious of it himself; he may have little time to analyze his own thoughts, or power to express his feelings; but if these dear ones were taken away, his object in life would be gone.

And so with other things. There have been devoted subjects who have lived entirely for a royal master—often even one little worthy of such love; there have been patriots who have lived wholly for their country; there have been artists who have lived for their art.

Surely a Christian may so live for his Master that the daily all-pervading thought will be how to please Him; that he will search the Scriptures, in which His will has been expressed, diligently, to see what the Lord would have him do; that his eye will be ever turned, as it were, to his Lord, to seek for the indications of His will.

And one who seeks so to do, even very im-

perfectly and feebly, will receive the promise we meet in the next verse of this Psalm—"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season."

In Jeremiah xvii. 7, 8, we have the same thought brought out more fully. A touch of description is added—"That spreadeth out her roots by the river." In a hot and dry climate especially, the difference between a tree growing by a *river* and one dependent on some chance rain-pool or tank, is great. The artificial or temporary supply of water may easily dry up in a few hot days, and the roots, lacking their nourishment, wither and fade; but a river, fed from deep reservoirs unaffected by the heat, or from mountain snows, which that very heat melts, gives the constant supply to the spreading fibres, which will keep them nourished and healthful.

In Jeremiah the contrast is drawn between the man who "trusteth in the Lord," and he who "trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm." And, perhaps, the declension in Christian life we have spoken of may sometimes arise from this latter course. We *think* we are looking to God only; we mean to do so; but unconsciously we are really placing our dependence on some earthly friend, or some human teacher, who is taking the place that

only Christ Himself should take. We are drawing water from the tank or the rain-pool instead of the river, and some day when we least expect it, the supply fails.

But one who seeks to live by the side of the "river that maketh glad the city of God"—the "river of the water of life," which Christ gives freely to "whosoever *will*," may look confidently for the blessing. He will meditate on the law of God, because the nearer he lives to Christ the more his eyes will be opened to see "the wondrous things out of" that law. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee," will be his experience. It is the talisman to guard us from moral and mental poison, to keep us from the first step on the downward path.

And one who walks in the spirit of the opening Psalm will enter into the joy of the closing one. That glorious series of divine songs, opening with law and service, ends with praise. And one who seeks to know and follow the law of his God, as in this first Psalm, will be the one best able to join in the note of triumph in the last—

"LET EVERYTHING THAT HATH BREATH.
PRAISE THE LORD."

CHAPTER VII.

NEGATIVES IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

Prov. iii. 3—11.

WE have here a set of negative exhortations of a somewhat different character from those of Psalm i.

They begin with a comprehensive exhortation, and then go on to touch on various points in detail.

The general and comprehensive one on which all the others seem to hang, is,—“Let not mercy and truth part from thee” (ver. 3). Mercy and truth, in God’s dealings with men, are often dwelt on in Scripture (as in Psalm lxxxv. 10), but we do not always keep sufficiently in mind how much all human virtue and holiness must depend on these two poles, as it were, which balance and supplement one another like the two forces which keep the earth on its axis.

Every transgression of God's moral law is in fact a failure either in "mercy"—*i.e.*, love to mankind; or "truth"—*i.e.*, obedience, uprightness, and fidelity. "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated" (James iii. 17).

Human nature is prone to lean on one side or the other, cultivating one virtue and neglecting its opposite; lax on the one hand, harsh on the other; charity without justice, or justice without charity. Sometimes we fly from one extreme to another; sometimes it will literally happen that "from him that hath not shall be taken even that he hath;" and thus sinful laxity will end in making him who indulged in it at last unloving, while justice without charity will end at last in making us unjust.

We can only escape this by making "mercy and truth" our watchword; love and kindness towards the sinner, severity for the sin; patience under personal wrongs, boldness and uncompromising firmness in combating evil.

The next negative command is one which enters more into detail. "Trust in the Lord . . . and *lean not to thine own understanding.*" The context shows that this is a leaning which cannot exist along with real heart-trust and reliance.

But what is "leaning to the understanding"? Not using our reason and our judgment in deciding and acting, as some have said. Our reason has been given us by God as truly as our eyesight, and to refuse to employ it would be as foolishly ungrateful as wilfully to shut our eyes. But "leaning to our understanding," or, as we should now say, leaning on, or towards our understanding, is, in a word, making our reason the master instead of the servant.

There are many ways of doing this. Some explain away God's Word where it does not meet their preconceived notions, and declare it is "impossible" such and such things should be really inspired. Some cut down God's requirements and standard of holiness to meet their own failures and deficiencies, and try to persuade themselves that He does not require of them that watchfulness against sin which they are not inclined to exercise. All this is "leaning to our own understanding."

Sometimes, again, we commit the same error in a different way. We mistake our own impressions, frames, or feelings, for God's voice in the heart, and insist on it that we have been "led by Him" to take some step, or act in some way which has really been t^h

effect of our own will, or our own imagination.

It is quite possible to be self-deceived on such a point, and to profess sincerely the most entire sense of our own helplessness and dependence on God, while at the same time we are practically "leaning on our own understanding."

And such a delusion is really more dangerous and less easily remedied than that which springs from the mere commonplace self-conceit of a worldly person, because the self-deceived Christian professor takes the echo of his own words for the voice of God.

The very words of Scripture may be perverted and made to take the colour of our own thoughts, and seem to tell us what they do not really tell. It was doubtless from seeing this danger that the Apostle adopted as his own the words of the following passage, and exhorted the readers of the Epistle to the Romans not to be "wise in their own conceits" (Rom. xii. 16).

But how can this danger be escaped? How shall we keep clear of the delusion of unconsciously "leaning" to, or on, "our own understanding," while we believe ourselves to be truly "trusting in the Lord"?

Only by watchfulness and prayer. There is no prayer which a Christian needs so continually to offer up, as that against what is called in our Litany "all blindness of heart" —in other words, self-deceit in all its varied forms. Let us continually ask for a single eye ; for simplicity of purpose ; for the hearing ear to listen for God's voice, and follow His leading and not our own ; for a spirit of self-distrust, that we may walk before Him "circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" — so we may be preserved from "leaning to our own understanding."

CHAPTER VIII.

NEGATIVES IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS (continued).

Prov. iii. 11—27.

OUR next negative is one of quite a different nature. It is the same as the one we afterwards find reproduced in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him."

This precept shows us two wrong ways of meeting trouble; the commonest is the last mentioned—the fainting, or growing weary under trial. It is the ordinary way in which the world meets sorrow and pain; and too often real Christians, if not on their guard, will allow themselves to be as utterly crushed by affliction as if they did not believe themselves to be in the hands of a wise and loving Father.

We have to keep in mind, however, that we are very liable to judge our neighbours harshly

and unjustly on this point. We may hastily conclude that another is "fainting," or faithlessly giving way under the pressure of affliction, when perhaps his natural temperament, or the peculiar circumstances of the case, may be such that he is really making a far greater effort to bear up than another differently constituted who seems more courageous.

Only the all-seeing One can really tell the difference between an involuntary cry of agony and a rebellious murmur. Job's friends reproached him for his impatience, but God judged differently.

We have only to look to ourselves, and watch that *we* do not allow ourselves to "faint in the day of adversity." Often we fancy we have been courageous, because in reality the trial has not touched the sensitive point at which the soul shivers. When that point comes, we all know what it is to feel that unless we cling to the Lord's protecting Arm, we *must* sink.

But there is again such a thing as "*despising* the chastening of the Lord," and courageous, resolute characters, not easily crushed by suffering, are peculiarly liable to this. Sometimes what they truly believe to be fortitude is really only the spirit of bravado, which will make a refractory child persuade himself and

others that he does not mind the punishment inflicted.

And this defiant spirit is very apt to take the disguise of devoted Christian faith. The Apostle's "rejoicing in tribulation" is taken up in a spirit more like Stoicism than Christianity. Such persons forget that when God sends us trouble, He *means* us to feel it. We are not rebelliously to resist or complain; but neither are we to persuade ourselves that the rod is no rod at all.

The right spirit is that of David when meekly submitting to the heavy punishment of his crime, the loss of his child, his humiliating exile and defeat, and at last the renouncing of the cherished wish of his lifetime, the building of a house for the Lord; or that of Moses, when he avows to the Israelites his longing wish to enter the Promised Land, and humbly acquiesces in the Lord's refusal of his request.

Thus, again, we have the two extremes to avoid, to which the human heart, "a defiant, cowardly thing" (as would be the literal translation of Luther's version of Jeremiah xvii. 9, which we have rendered "deceitful and desperately wicked," *) is liable on both sides.

* Which translation is the most correct is a question we cannot attempt to enter on.

The next negative precept concerns our duty to our neighbours:—"Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go and come again, when thou hast it by thee" (vv. 27, 28).

These are no superfluous cautions, even to those who are really high principled and who desire to serve God. The enemy of our souls is much too wary to say, at least to one who is actuated by right motives, "Here is a sin, commit it." He persuades them that the wrong action he would lead them to take, is justifiable or even necessary under the circumstances. And this is what tempts some who should know better, as before observed, to act unfairly in the relations of landlord and tenant, employer and employed, cutting down the claims of those who are in the subordinate position to the lowest figure, or deferring payments till the poor creditor is reduced to actual distress. How much intense suffering is caused by thoughtless injustice of this kind, those know who are much thrown among poor and struggling work-people; and often the author of their suffering is one deficient neither in natural kind-heartedness or in good intentions.

How much do we need to pray to have our

eyes opened lest we go astray unawares ! Our only safeguard is to endeavour to follow the "golden rule," asking ourselves, if such and such conduct would seem to us fair and just if it were our own case ; and if we must choose between satisfying just claims and helping an object dear to our hearts, rather to give up the pleasure than withhold good "from those to whom it is due."

And then look to the *positive* precept, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him." So shall we be kept from self-conceit and "wisdom in our own eyes," from stoical pride, and querulous "fainting" under trial, from unfair dealing with those with whom we have to do ; and be enabled to "follow fully" those "paths of the Lord" which are all "mercy and truth."

CHAPTER IX.

NEGATIVES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

I Cor. xiii.

THE next series of "Negatives" we are about to consider is found in the New Testament.

The wonderful and beautiful picture of Christian love ("charity," as the Authorized Version renders it*) in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, opens with enumerating those things in which true love does not consist, and then goes on to point out those things which such love, carried into practice, will not do.

The chapter opens with a list of gifts of the Spirit, which without love are of no avail. The outward gifts of miraculous wisdom, tongues, faith "to remove mountains" (by which is generally understood the faith which enabled the

* The word "Love" adopted in the Revised Version has the great advantage of including our relations to God and man. Whereas "Charity" can only refer to our duty to man.

possessor to work miracles) are first mentioned, and then the Apostle goes a step further, speaks of outward acts of munificence—goods given to the poor, and lastly, even the very body yielded to martyrdom, and all these acts without love, and therefore of no value in the sight of God.*

But next, to show us what charity, or Christian love, really *is*, we have a string of negatives. The longsuffering kindness is the only *positive* sign mentioned for three verses. Then come the negative characteristics, that is, what Christian love will NOT do. Let us examine them one by one.

"Envieth not."

"Oh, but no real Christian could ever be tempted to envy! None but the basest and meanest of mankind could feel so degrading a passion." This is the objection many will make. A lively German writer says, "Envy is something so nasty that no one will touch it."

But look a little closer, and see how the mischief begins. There are many sentiments, perfectly natural and not in themselves blameable, which serve as a disguise in which the enemy creeps in, and which therefore require to be kept very carefully in check.

* The great heathen moralist, Aristotle, notices this feeling, and calls it. "Nemesis."

For example, it is a part of our nature to feel pain at seeing some good thing, which we should ourselves value greatly, misused or overlooked by its possessor.

A solitary orphan, craving for love and tender care, sees a spoilt, wayward companion ungrateful to kind and affectionate parents. A poor student, longing for books, sees a well-stored library wasted on an ignorant rich man. An earnest worker for the Lord, struggling against the hindrance of a feeble and suffering frame, sees a careless neighbour wasting the precious gift of perfect health on trifles.

The thought must come to such—"How hard that another should waste and despise what would be to me a treasure beyond price!" It is a natural thought—but it opens a door through which the first advances of the Tempter are made.

The *next* step is to feel a kind of secret ill-will towards the possessors of these wasted gifts. And as in most cases they *are* more or less wrong, we are easily led to think it is not ill-will, but *only* moral disapproval. And so, step by step, we are led on to something very like the hateful sin of which we think ourselves incapable.

Or take another case—and this is the way

in which party spirit often paves the way for envy to follow it. You are a Christian worker ; you are carrying on, or helping, a work which you believe to be truly of God. A similar work is carried on by others in a way which you have reason to disapprove. Perhaps they have acted unfairly or unkindly by you. Alas ! such things are not as rare as they should be among Christian workers ! You think, and perhaps think justly, that the spirit in which they work is a wrong one, or the plan pursued really objectionable. They meet, however, with some unexpected token of success, which is made the most of by their friends. This perhaps is brought forward against you in reproach because you have no such encouraging incident to relate.

Are you sure, in such a case, that you have never allowed yourself to harbour any feeling of annoyance or irritation ? That you have never been tempted to depreciate in your turn those who have shown a spirit of rivalry towards you ? Can you, like the Apostle, rejoice when Christ is preached "even of envy and strife" ? If you have never been so placed as to feel the temptation, do not venture to answer these questions till you have been put to the test. Ah ! it is not so easy as we are apt to think to act up to the full sense of these words—"Envieth not."

Let us look on to the next clause. "Vaunteth not itself."

Here is another snare laid for us by the tempter; he assures us that we are such humble Christians, we cannot be tempted to vaunt! Even if charity did not hinder us, we should be prevented by a sense of the *bad taste* of boasting! But is it always so? Do we not sometimes read reports of Christian work in which we can trace a good deal of vain-glory under the cloak of humility?

It is right and needful that workers from time to time should give some account of what they do; if they receive help from others, they are bound to show that the money received is well spent; but do we not often find a much freer use of that favourite letter "I" than is at all needed?

Contrast the histories of the Apostles and Evangelists. How completely they, so to speak, *forget themselves* in their accounts of the great work on which their minds are set! If we had St. Matthew's narrative alone, we should never have known that he abandoned a gainful trade for Christ's sake, or that he made Him a feast to do Him honour and to gather together his old associates to hear the same word which had changed his whole life.

And yet there is no affected self-depreciation, which is often used as a covert way of "vaunting ourselves." There is a way of dwelling on past sins and present weaknesses which almost reminds one of the pleasure some sick people take in dilating on their maladies ; both come in fact very often from the same source,—eagerness to speak about *self*.

On the other hand, there is a kind of ostentatious avoidance of mentioning one's own name where it is *really* called for, which may savour of self-seeking in another form. The only right way is to do as Samuel did when he was reminding the Israelites of the deliverers God had raised up for them : " Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and *Samuel*." He mentions his own name with perfect simplicity, as he does those of others. His mind was too full of the main object he had in view for him to have time either for direct "vaunting" or for self-depreciation.

But again, "Is not puffed up."

We may abstain from open vaunting, and yet be unconsciously indulging a spirit of self-exaltation. Especially are we liable to this if God has enabled us to accomplish some useful object, or in any way to be helpful to others.

"But," it will be objected, "we cannot be in

danger of being puffed up if we keep in mind that all we have is from God."

Cannot we? Have we never heard of any one being "puffed up" by the favour of an earthly prince? Is thy favour of the King of kings a less honour? David said, "I shall never be moved; Lord, by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong." And it was needful for him that he should be humbled by God's hiding His face from him (Psalm xxx. 6, 7).

How many good works have been set on foot and seemed to go on well, and then, we hardly knew how, came a blight and a failure, and it seems as if all had withered away like the grass! May it not sometimes be because the worker had allowed himself to be "puffed up," and so was off his guard? Or again, one of those sad falls, cases of glaring and humiliating inconsistency, in one who had seemed to be a true servant of God. May not the evil one have taken advantage of a period of carelessness which began in this same way—being "puffed up"?

Are we then to refuse ourselves the joy we naturally feel when we have reason to think God has in some way made use of us and allowed us to "occupy" for Him? Can a human being feel a deeper, purer joy—and must we turn from

it and push the cup from our thirsting lips? No, surely. The Lord is not a hard master. The full rapture of the "Well done, good and faithful servant," is for the great reckoning day above: still, if a taste of joyful hope be given us here, let us thankfully and simply accept it; but let us be jealously watchful, and earnest in prayer in the midst of our joy, that we may be kept very humble, and that our gratefulness to God may not assume the character of the Pharisee's self-righteous thanksgiving.

Let us proceed to the next head: "Doth not behave itself unseemly."

This is a point many Christian workers at the present day are liable to forget. If we allow our work for the highest objects to lead us into anything unbefitting our age, sex, station in life, or peculiar position, we are then and there transgressing the apostolic command and bringing a wrong element to bear on our Christian activity. Let us be very sure that a work which involves the breaking through of any of these legitimate boundaries is not God's work for *us*, whatever it may be for others differently circumstanced.

In daily life it is the same. For instance, how many young people in these days allow themselves to speak to their elders in a tone which

could only be suitable if their ages were reversed. It may be that the younger person is better instructed and further advanced in Christian knowledge than the elder : but still it requires great delicacy and tact, as has been already observed, to rebuke an older person, especially if, as often happens, it is a parent, or one who is in some degree in a parent's place, who is addressed. Yet how often do even truly Christian young people forget this !

And it is the same with position. In Christ, as His members, the humblest Scripture Reader and the Christian Peer stand on the same level ; but the Apostle warns us to "render to all their due," and exhorts even the slaves of believing masters not to "despise them (or take liberties with them) because they are brethren." And if the injudicious kindness of friends in a high station, as often happens, tempts some worker in a humble position to forget these injunctions, and to speak of Lady —, or General — as "Dear Sister or Brother So-and-so," he is, however inadvertently, trenching on the command not to "behave unseemly."

CHAPTER X.

NEGATIVES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1 Cor. xiii. (*continued*).

“**L**OVE seeketh not her own.” How much these few words convey! How often do “offences come” in the Christian Church, how often Christian work is marred, and ties of affection and friendship are loosened, and families divided, merely because in some form or other this subtle demon of self-seeking has crept in!

And it is very hard to detect. Many think, if they are free from the grosser forms of selfishness, such as trampling on the claims of others for the sake of their own gain or pleasure, etc., they are quite safe from the charge of self-seeking. But it was a weighty word that was said by a late eminent thinker and writer*—“Every one has a *self* of his own.”

* Archbishop Whately.

It is very possible to make great sacrifices of time, or money, or strength, or comfort, and even to lead what spectators would call a very self-denying life, and yet to be seeking in one form or another that secret "self" which is truly our own," and which, when it is driven from the outposts, will take refuge in one of the inner fortresses from which it is indeed hard to dislodge it.

"Our own rights." How continually those words are made the battle-cry of those who are for ever contending for what is "due to *them*." And how often this stickling for some "right," perhaps a very trifling matter in the beginning, has been the first "letting out of water" for a course of contention, and strife, and clamour, and bitterness, which may well make the Christian sad and the ungodly triumph, for such things may be found sometimes among those who are of the "household of faith," though they have allowed the enemy, in this case, to get the mastery over them!

But are we never, then, to make a stand for anything which is rightly our own? Far from it. This would be running into as hurtful an extreme on the other side.

Many a husband will allow in his wife, many a mother in her children, many a head of a

household or school in those placed under his or her care, things which they know are wrong and ought to forbid, but which they are led to tolerate from want of firmness or from indolence, which they mistake for gentleness and patience. In refusing to exercise their right of control they are often, in fact, "*seeking* their own;" for the "*own*" which *they* care for is peace and quiet at any expense.

Such weak compliance is not the true Christian love we are speaking of.

But even apart from this, there are often cases in which justice and truth, and even the good of others, may make it a duty to claim our fair and just right, as the Apostle did when he appealed to his privileges of a Roman citizen.

But in all these cases duty is involved. It has been well remarked by a living writer, that the common cry is, "Our rights and other people's duties," whereas the Christian motto should be "*Our duties*, and other people's rights." And at the call of such Christian duty we must be prepared, if needful, to forego a just claim.

But "*our own*" includes more than this. Our own *work* is often made "*a self*" of, and this most frequently by active and zealous Christians. To those who really know and feel the privilege of active service in His cause

who has redeemed them, their own special work may often become the nearest and dearest thing they have in life. Some who have hardly anything else left which they can call their own on earth, feel that such an occupation supplies the natural craving for something that is theirs in particular; their Christian work often takes the place almost of home, family, or profession.

Is this to be blamed? Surely not; rather should we thank the Lord who has thus ordered it that many a lonely path should be cheered and lightened, and service for Him made not only a duty but a happiness. To love the work He gives us is no more than right; but let us remember that there is a danger, the danger of loving that work *more* than we love Him; the danger of making it that "self" of our own which we are commanded not "to seek."

If we once begin to think more of the work itself than of Him we are doing it for—if the author allows himself to be more eager for the success of his book, or the pastor for his parish work, or the missionary for his own particular mission or school, than the real spread of the Kingdom of Christ, if our own department, be it what it may, becomes to us the *end* and not the *means*,—then, indeed, and so far as it is such to us, we are "seeking our own."

How much of what we think to be zeal for the good of souls, and the glory of God, is really zeal for ourselves! Is not this "seeking our own" at the root of much of that *missionary jealousy* which we sometimes see deforming what would otherwise be a noble labour of love? The words "*our* field," "*our* object," "*our* success," how often they come in to mar the simplicity which should mark the Christian labourer! How often the efforts of a worker in the vineyard who "followeth not with US," are ignored or slighted, how often his labours are only noticed to mark their defects, his failures eagerly commented on, and his successes passed over! Would this be the case if we were altogether free from "seeking our own"?

Or, again, our sense of secret self-complacency in our own successful efforts, a feeling to which we may cling without being eager for the applause of others. If we doubt this, let us test ourselves by remembering what we have felt when called from some duty or some work which we thought we did well, to do something in which there was a conscious sense of failure throughout, or to plod on steadily through some of those apparently thankless, discouraging tasks in which, from their very nature, the pleasure of successful

endeavours must be absent; or, harder still, "to stand and wait" for a while in quietness.

If any one can venture to say such a trial is not a real and deep one, he can never have experienced it. We should not be human if we did not feel it; yet if we were quite free from all "seeking our own" in these things, from all intense longing not only for credit but for inward self-complacency, would not much of the bitterness of the trial be taken away?

If we did but realize that none of our work is in point of fact *ours*, but all His "whose we are, and whom we serve,"—if we did but keep in mind that His glory, which we profess to be so anxious for, is surely as safe in His hands as our souls, which we have committed to His keeping,—if "not I, but Christ," could be our prevailing feeling, not only as to the bearing of our sins, but as to the glory of His work and the spread of His Kingdom,—should we not be able to rest more quietly on Him under all these varied forms of trial?

Often, indeed, it may be, we should escape them altogether, for may it not be the self-seeking that lurks at the bottom of so much Christian effort, that doubtless often makes it needful that we should be disciplined in this

particular way by Him who cannot let evil pass unchecked in His children?

Again, that precious family peace, which, when it is preserved intact, may make even a very humble home "a little heaven below," how often it is marred and even destroyed by this same spirit of "seeking our own"! Those who do truly love each other and desire each other's welfare, are yet eager to stand up for their own claims, or credit, or opinions, in short, to use the common expressive phrase, "*their own way.*"

It has been truly observed that many who will renounce everything else in life, are unable to renounce that one thing, their *will*. They could be martyrs joyfully, they think, if only it could be *their choice*; but the way they are to take must be their own. They would devote themselves to the good of others, strip themselves of all they have, toil and strive to make others happy, but the happiness must be in the particular way they have themselves chosen. They would bear or do anything they themselves undertook to bear, but to step one hair's breadth out of their path at another's desire, seems beyond their power.

And yet they, and their friends for them, will acquiesce in this defect as if it was quite

inseparable from them, and absolutely impossible to overcome. We hear it said as a matter of course, "So-and-so is an excellent man, but he can only work alone;" "Such another can never get on with others," etc. And yet is not this determination to have our own way quite as much a "seeking our own," as if our objects were the commoner and more obvious ones of our own advantage or pleasure?

But even without any such special temptation, must we not all feel that much, very much of what we looked on as pure Christian zeal and love, has been mixed up sadly with this evil spirit of self-seeking? That often when we thought we were confessing Christ, we were really confessing ourselves?

A ray of heavenly light sent into the soul, like a sunbeam in a dark room, will at once show the motes and dust which are collected there. We could not bear that powerful light, shed on the weakness and defilements of our hearts, but by looking to the Author and Finisher of our Faith, that glorious One whose blood cleanses from guilt, and Whose Spirit can and will teach us to walk more circumspectly and to seek the "mind that was in Christ Jesus."

Or "our own credit." We can rejoice in

what others have done, if only they will do us the justice to remember that *we* began it, or helped some one else who did, or set some spring in motion without which it would never have come to pass. But if justice is not observed in these things; if our real share in a good work is passed over or in a manner ignored, are we willing to acquiesce patiently in the trial?—(for a trial it undoubtedly is)—are we willing and content "to fill a little space, so Christ be glorified"?

We are willing to be "nothing" in God's sight, but if He calls us to the trial of being "nothing" in *man's* sight, too, are we willing to accept it for His sake?

CHAPTER XI.

NEGATIVES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1 Cor. xiii. (*continued*).

“ [S not easily provoked.” In the Revised Version it is simply “not provoked;” and this is in fact the most correct rendering. The sense of the original seems to imply giving way to a sharp and impatient ebullition of feeling: * but doubtless the Apostle’s meaning includes all manifestations of uncontrolled temper.

And in truth there is no class of faults against which it is more needful to warn real Christians, for there is none on which they are habitually less on their guard. No one would venture deliberately to declare that faults of temper were of no consequence; but in practice too many act as if they really thought so.

One may hear a religious person whose

* It is the same root, etymologically, as our word “paroxysm.”

morose, harsh, or hasty temper made all around him uncomfortable, spoken of as "eminently holy;" and yet there is no greater hindrance to influence for good than indulgence in faults of this kind.

Perhaps one reason why those who in general run well "are so liable to them, is that it is much harder to define faults of this kind than others. Very often it is not so much the actual words said, as the tone and the look, and the manner which accompanies them. We little know how such things are watched, even in foreign countries, by those who do not understand our language; or how often the gift of a tract, or Gospel, or the like, has been neutralized practically the very next moment by the raised voice and gesture of impatience at some annoyance, and the words whose import, even if spoken in an unknown tongue, has been fully comprehended by the looker-on.

Another difficulty is, that our physical and mental state modifies our impressions of things around us, much more than we are generally aware of. If we feel ill and depressed, the children we have to teach seem particularly stupid or troublesome; the servants particularly careless; our friends and companions particularly neglectful of our wishes, provoking, or unjust.

Especially is this the case when we have been exposed to some really severe trial. It is a great mistake to say that great troubles make us at the time insensible to little ones. It may happen sometimes from a stunning blow ; but, in the majority of cases, the tension of mind under trial, especially if anxiety or harassing suspense form part of it, has the effect of making us *more* sensitive to little subjects of irritation. We have received, perhaps, a distressing letter, or bad news ; we try to receive it submissively, but we forget to watch against the irritability of nerves which often follows. There are states of mental distress which produce a tension of nerves almost like that often caused by bodily illness,—states in which even such trifles as a sudden loud voice, a slammed door, a stumbling block in our path, or the like, will actually upset our composure as it does that of some nervous invalids ; and thus it will often happen that one who has humbly and trustfully met some really heavy blow, will the next instant completely lose self-control at some mere trifle.

If we see this in others, it is our part to be very patient with them, and try to look on their irritation like an involuntary cry of pain. Only God can know how far they are able to subdue it.

But in ourselves, when the day of trial comes, we must meet it with the recollection that we may very likely—especially if naturally of a sensitive temperament—be tempted to sin in this way, and remember it *is sin*, however human infirmity may be the excuse for it. It is sin which requires the cleansing blood of Him who was Himself "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," who was called on to undergo the extremity of mental trial and bodily agony, and bore all without ever uttering a sharp or impatient word.

Let us turn to Him for help. He who was tempted as we are, and never broke the force of the blow by yielding, can pity His poor weak children with a deep and loving compassion which *they* are too frail themselves to be able to give to each other. Let us tell Him our trouble and ask for strength to bear it meekly and calmly. Our only safety is in looking up for help against such temptations, not once or twice, but daily and hourly.

Then again, pride often leads to our being "provoked." We cannot bear to have anything we have done or said criticised or found fault with; we do not like to acknowledge this to ourselves, and so we take refuge in the thought

that others are hard upon us, and that we "do well to be angry."

If we would learn the love which is "not provoked," we must ask for a humble, self-forgetting spirit, and at the same time watch against all outward expressions of annoyance. To "bridle the tongue" is not the whole work of the Christian; unless he seeks also to "rule his spirit." The former is only half doing the work; but still, the suppression of the outward signs of anger is the first important step towards victory. It is the carrying of the outposts. Nothing fosters angry feelings so much as giving them expression in impatient words. Let the Psalmist's watchword be ours—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips;" and so shall we be able more and more to act up to the spirit of that love which is "not provoked."

"Thinketh no evil." How often we have all reason to feel that we have fallen short here! But it is needful to understand clearly the real meaning of the precept. Some speak as if it meant that we are never to think any one in the wrong. The Apostles did not take it in that light. Both St. Paul and St. John spoke with severity of false teachers and deceitful workers. What it clearly does condemn, is a readiness to

impute evil without good grounds; to put the worst construction on something which would bear a milder one; to visit severely some supposed fault in a person who is distasteful to us, while we might pass over a greater one in one we liked.

It condemns harsh and hasty judgments, rash conclusions, and all that infringes the spirit, if not the letter, of the Ninth Commandment by bearing, not directly and entirely a *false* witness against our neighbour, but one which we could not *know* to be true, and which *might* be false.

Closely connected with this is the last negative precept of this wondrous series—"Rejoiceth not in iniquity."

At first we might be tempted to exclaim, "But how could any Christian be tempted to take pleasure in what is only matter of joy to evil spirits?" But wait and consider a little. The tempter does not put the sin before us in its glaring deformity. He watches his opportunity and puts on a disguise. Perhaps we have warned others, and warned them in vain, against one whom we have good reason to distrust. We have been blamed for our caution instead of being listened to. At last an open fall takes place which unmasks the deceived.

We are rightly thankful that the eyes of our friends are opened. But do we always stop there? are we not sometimes led to exult over the sinner, as well as to rejoice that the harm he did is stopped?

Or we have been dreading the prevalence of some wrong and dangerous opinion. We hear of a case in which the propagator of such opinions has gone wrong in a way to show what evil they lead to. Are we never tempted to let our satisfaction at the check which the false teaching receives, degenerate into triumph over the teacher's fall? and is not this, however we may veil it to ourselves, something like "rejoicing in iniquity"?

But how are we to meet the danger? Are we to be indifferent whether wrong or right gets the better, whether truth is brought to light or no? Certainly not. But go on to the next clause, "Rejoiceth IN THE TRUTH."

No half-hearted indifference here; none of the lax, false charity which thinks every one right and no one wrong, and makes light of sin and error. The wisdom from above, first pure and then peaceable, rejoices not in iniquity, but in the truth. It is earnest, zealous for right and purity and truth and integrity, ready to make war to the death with false teaching and

wrong practice, but also tenderly compassionate to the individual sinners, and desirous of reclaiming them and bringing them into the fold.

But now let us take these negatives the contrary way, and turn to the positive side.

Not to envy, is to take a generous pleasure in the good of others, even when we have no share in promoting it. Not to vaunt, or be puffed up, is to be humble, modest, and courteous. Not to seek our own, is to be unselfish and self-denying. Not to be provoked, is to be long-suffering and patient.

Think what any one Christian man, woman, or child, who acted fully up to these precepts, would be. What tender, thoughtful, noble kindness to all it would imply! What meekness, and yet what dignity and courage; what delicacy and refinement of mind and manners, even in the most humble in station!

It is the fashion of the present day to speak of "culture" as the one thing which will regenerate the world, and set everything right. It is wrong and foolish to undervalue mental improvement and education. These are never to be neglected or overlooked; but we may depend on it, there is no culture like Christian culture, and no refining power like the power of true, thorough-going, all-pervading Christian principle.

We may indeed meet with true Christians who are vulgar and coarse and rough in their ways ; but we believe that if they brought their Christianity to bear upon every part of their character, their coarseness and roughness would disappear. They might be wanting in outward gracefulness, for want of early training, but there would be real, true refinement underneath.

And then again, let us try to imagine what the world would be if all Christians acted simply up to the requirements of this wondrous list of negatives. What positive good, what positive blessing, would be the result ! Just as the negatives form our clearest conception of heaven, and we feel that a world where there is no death, sorrow, crying, pain, or tears, must in itself be a world of unspeakable bliss, so we may well feel that a Christian circle in which there was no approach to envy, vaunting, unseemly behaviour, self-seeking, hastiness of temper, or unkind triumph over another's fall, would be a paradise on earth, even in the midst of the elements of suffering.

For the first, we must wait till we are on the "other shore." But to the paradise of charity we can make, each for ourselves, some approach.

But who is sufficient for these things ? Here

is the answer, "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 10). True faith "worketh by love" (Gal. v. 6). When we have laid hold of Christ with the hand of faith, He will fill our hearts with His love; and that love will work by bringing us more and more to the reality of the wondrous and lovely picture we have been contemplating. If we feel—and which of us has not cause to feel?—how very, very far we are short of it, let us turn again and look at our Copy, and then turn once more to the Fountain of all our strength, and ask Him to supply us. We shall always to the end feel that we are far behind the glorious reality; but though we ourselves may not fully be aware of it, we shall be gradually assimilated to our blessed Copy.

PART II.

The Positive Side.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEATITUDES.

WE have been studying a few of the *negative* precepts in God's Word. It will be well now to consider the opposite or *positive* side, and look at some of the direct commands, exhortations, or declarations of blessing given us in the Scriptures.

The first we will consider are to be found in those eight opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount, with which, under the title of Beatitudes, we are all so familiar.

But that very familiarity is often a snare to us, by leading us to get into the habit of taking a careless and superficial view of that which is full of the deepest truth. And perhaps a few

thoughts on these precepts, well-known as they are, may be found helpful to some.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Have we ever asked ourselves why this is the blessing chosen to open this series of promises?

Let us look closer at it. The term "poor" does not mean here, those who have but little; it means those who are absolutely without *anything* of their own, who must depend on the charity of another for their very subsistence.

We all know that through this door we must come to be saved. We must all come to Christ saying, "Nothing in my hand I bring;" but many of us who have entered the fold in this spirit, forget, as we have received Christ, even so "we must walk in Him." We forget that there is just as great a lack of true poverty of spirit in thinking we can make ourselves holy, as in thinking we can purchase our own pardon. We slide gradually and quite unconsciously, very often, into a state of feeling which implies a belief that somehow we can go on in our own strength,—with God's help, of course,—but still doing the work as if it were our *own* and not *His*.

We do not say it, or write it, or frame any definite idea about it; and yet still we are

acting on it unawares. Perhaps even we may have been singing, as we believe, with genuine feeling, "Oh to be nothing, nothing!" and yet all the while praising ourselves on our humility in wishing to be nothing, or fancying we wish it, forgetting that in reality our nothingness is not a thing to be wished for, so much as an absolute and simple matter of fact, to be admitted and received. Whether we wish it or not, we *are* nothing in ourselves; and only the power of the Holy Spirit working in us can enable us to withstand temptation, or to think or act rightly for a moment.

Again, it is very easy to think we are humble, because we use depreciating expressions about ourselves. Even in private, before God, we may deceive ourselves in this way, if not on our guard. And we may even take a secret pride in spiritual or moral attainments, at the very time that we are dwelling, in our speech to others, or even in our prayers and solitary meditations, on our own weakness and sinfulness. It is never well to lay down hard and fast rules in such things, and least of all to attempt to judge of others; but, speaking generally, it will be found that those who are most ready to dilate on their sinfulness before others, are those who feel it the least deeply; and that true

poverty of spirit will commonly go along with reticence in the manner of outward expression.

But many circumstances may modify this in individual cases; only it is well for us, each for himself or herself, to be sedulously on the watch on this side, lest our unsleeping tempter should cause that to evaporate in words which ought to pervade our whole inner life. A life so imbued with true poverty of spirit will realize, even here below, the blessings of the "Kingdom of Heaven."

There are treasures of heavenly blessings in God's storehouse which are only revealed to the truly humble. How often we may have lost such from the indulgence of some secret canker of spiritual pride, none of us can fully know—no one but the Searcher of hearts. Let us ask Him to make us really "poor in spirit."

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Some have taken this to be merely an allusion to the benefits of sanctified affliction; but the context seems to show that it points rather to a Christian grace than to a dispensation of God's providence. The "blessed mourners" are those who sorrow for sin. But there is a right and a wrong way of mourning, even for our sins. Some lament over their sinfulness, as they might over sickness or bodily infirmity, in a tone of

melancholy resignation, as if it must be patiently acquiesced in as an inevitable evil. This is not the kind of mourning to which a blessing is promised. Neither is there a blessing on that kind of sorrow which is made public property—a continual dwelling on our own shortcomings, as observed before—in speaking or writing to others, as if we wished them to see how deeply humbled we felt. This resembles too much the spirit of those who disfigured their faces, that “they might appear unto men to fast.” Our humiliation (unless we have a wrong to repair, or advice to give or seek, which may make it needful to speak openly) should be to our “Father, who seeth in secret,” alone.

And again, the “blessed” mourning will not be carried out in a spirit of morbid despondency. When Satan cannot prevent our grieving over failures, he sometimes persuades us to turn our very sorrow into a snare, and, as it were, to sit weeping by the wayside, instead of girding ourselves for action.

There is such a thing as has been quaintly called “mourning cheerfully ;” and mourning for *pardoned* sin should have this character, even though chastening has come with the pardon. The obedient child will accept the punishment humbly, but not turn away from the love which

sent the chastening. This was the spirit in which Moses uncomplainingly acquiesced in the severe disappointment of his lifelong hopes which his one failure had brought upon him ; calmly alluding to it in his last record of his labours, and then bravely going to his work again till he was called to depart. Such is the mourning which will most assuredly be "comforted."

CHAPTER II.

THE BEATITUDES (continued).

“ **B**LESSED are the meek ; for they shall inherit the earth.”

This, too, has often been greatly mistaken. One of the favourite devices of the enemy is to offer a spurious semblance of a virtue for a real one. It is very common to denominate a soft, yielding temper as “meek ;” and this has led to a prevalent impression, especially with young people, that “meekness” is a quality quite inconsistent with strength, dignity, or firmness of character.

But look at the Bible pictures of those whom God designates as meek. There was no want of boldness or dignity in Moses when he stood before Pharaoh, or rebuked the murmuring Israelites. Our Blessed Lord Himself, the “meek and lowly in heart,” showed as much of lofty courage as of patient submission.

True Christian meekness has nothing in

common with that weakly, compliant timidity, which will yield anything and everything "for the sake of peace," as such persons express it; which generally means, for the sake of being left quiet and unmolested themselves. This, as we observed before, is nothing but a subtle form of selfishness, to which gentle, sweet-tempered persons are not unfrequently prone, because their natural amiability veils the fault from themselves and others.

But the truly meek Christian will be firm and resolute in upholding truth and right principle, and defending others when needed, while ready to sacrifice personal comfort, pleasures, or credit; willing to take the lowest place, "in honour preferring one another."

Such meekness has not only the heavenly but the earthly blessing. It is the only beauty which has an earthly promise.

But what is "inheriting the earth"? Not always what are called "good things" here below. The meek may happen to have very few of what the world calls "good things," very little of earthly prosperity, but they reap their own recompense even on earth. Not only by the love they win—though this they do most surely gain—but there is a happiness, a peace, in the very act of living for others and

not for self, which only those who do so live can realize.

"Earthly happiness," it has been well remarked, "is a thing of which it may be said, 'Seek, and ye shall *not* find.'" Riches, fame, pleasure, power may fall to the lot of the grasping and selfish; but happiness is a delicate flower that will perish in their grasp.

"She inherited the earth in the fulness of the promise, though she never left her bed or changed her posture," was the description once given of an unselfish and patient Christian sufferer; and in this sense the meek will never fail to realize the blessing.

"Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

Here is a blessing on the first evidence we can often lay hold on for ourselves, that divine grace is working in our hearts.

"I cannot dare to say that any other beatitude applies to me," said an anxious Christian once, "but I know that I do hunger and thirst after righteousness."

But it is not all, even of true Christians, who truly "hunger and thirst" after this heavenly manna. It is one thing to long for the joys and comforts of the believer—the peace, and

the hope, and the support—and another to desire *righteousness*—not only Christ's righteousness as our plea and standing before God, but the holiness of life to which all Christ's disciples are "called."

Jesus is the Saviour of His people from their sins in both senses, not only from the guilt and the penalty of sin, but from its *power* in the heart, from that spiritual sickness of which the bodily sicknesses healed by Him when on earth were types. Are we all honestly and truly desirous—longing for real holiness of life and heart? Do we never make truces with our sins, excusing them to ourselves and others as infirmities we cannot altogether help; or trying to bring down, perhaps, half unconsciously, God's requirements to meet our low standard?

If we can detect these tendencies in our own hearts, we may well humble ourselves that we hunger and thirst so little after that holiness which is in the sight of God of such great price! If we could only know what a stumbling-block our falls are to those seeking for the truth; how often those who do trust in the Lord are, as the Psalmist says, "ashamed,"* because of the failures of their brethren; how

* Psalm lxi. 6, "Let not them that wait on Thee . . . be ashamed for my sake."

often our Master is wounded in the house of His friends, and His work crippled, and His cause hindered, and the ungodly made to triumph, by the inconsistency of Christian professors, we should seek far more earnestly for a true "hunger and thirst for righteousness."

But what comfort is here for those who, though conscious of many falls and much weakness, are yet mourning over their shortcomings, and longing, honestly and truly, to grow in grace! They may be but trembling, fainting pilgrims, advancing slowly and often stumbling; but if there is a true desire for this heavenly gift, we may be sure He will be "very gracious at the voice of their cry."

And the answer will come. They shall be *filled*. The desire is of God, and He never awakens a longing He does not intend amply to satisfy.

"Thou visitest the earth, when Thou hast made it to *desire rain*" (Psalm lxx., *margin*).

"Whosoever *will*, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. xxii. 17).

And all such shall have their desire granted. Not fully or completely while on earth; but they will have the cheering sense that the Lord has undertaken their cure, and that He who has "begun" the "good work" in them will finish

it. "He will perfect that which concerns" us (Psalm cxxxviii. 8), and "when we awake up after His likeness, we shall be satisfied" (Psalm xvii. 15, Prayer Book Version).

CHAPTER III.

BEATITUDES (continued).

“**B**LESSED are the merciful ; for they shall obtain mercy.”

Many of us, perhaps, feel as if this were an easy virtue to practise. We cannot hear of unmerciful conduct, of suffering, or wrong done to any, whether human beings or dumb animals, in any country or circumstances, without a movement of indignation against the oppressor, and an intense longing to fly, if we could, to set free and rescue all the sufferers. How *could* we be tempted to be unmerciful?

But are we always merciful to those who have *done wrong*, especially if that wrong affects us, or still more, those we love? Merciful, not in the sense of ignoring the wrong, (for *that* is not mercy but blameable indifference,) but in the sense of pitying the offender, of owning that often, very often, wrong and grievous wrong is done unconsciously and ignorantly—that it may

often be said of such, "They know not what they do."

This does not, of course, exonerate them from blame; but are we always merciful while we blame? Are we merciful in judging of others who have been led into error and sin, perhaps from ignorance, bad example, or weakness; or who are sorely tempted to some sins, which our temperament or education and position make no temptation to us at all?

No, it is not so easy, as we think at first, to be truly merciful. Our greatest help in attaining this virtue is the remembrance of the promise attached to it.

It is a remarkable one in this point of view; not "they shall be approved, they shall inherit such and such good things," but simply, they shall receive what they have bestowed on others; "they shall obtain," not praise, or honour, or enjoyment, but "MERCY."

It is like the words which come so soon after in the discourse of our Lord, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father shall orgive you."

It is at once a promise and a reminder: a promise based on our need of mercy; a reminder that, after all, the holiest and most established Christian needs *pardon* first of all. The debtor

who would be hard on his fellow-servant is put in mind that he himself owes his lord what he can never repay.

We can only be truly merciful by continually recalling to our minds that what we all most need is mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.”

Here we have a grace of which we must all feel that we fall far, far short. Pure in heart none can be by nature. As soon as light from above shines into the dark chambers of the soul, a sense of its impurity must follow; and the brighter the light becomes, the deeper that sense, and the keener the view of our imperfections. It is like a ray of sunlight let into a room which has been shut up; there is not really more dust in the sunbeam than in the other parts of the room, but the light makes the dust visible. So there can be no greater proof of the growth of spiritual life than an increasing sense of our own faults.

But this must not discourage us; if the Blessed Spirit of God is truly working in us, the purifying process is going on. God is “purifying our hearts by faith” (Acts xv. 9). Faith is the channel by which we receive the benefit of His sanctifying grace. Imperfect, after all,

earthly purity must be. It has been well observed that, compared with heavenly purity, it is as the snow, which, white as it may be, can yet be soiled, contrasted with the ray of pure sunlight, which no defilement can sully. But the more we learn to know of God, the more our hearts will be "cleansed through the inspiration of His Holy Spirit." The very mental look at Christ has a cleansing power.

And the reward promised is also the means by which we are purified,—the "seeing God." He who looks forward to seeing Him "as He is," will seek to "purify himself, even as He is pure" (1 John iii. 3). And again, the more we are able to turn our eyes to the Lord, the more surely will the purifying process go on in our hearts.

But we need to be very watchful lest what may seem a little thing should act like a speck or mote in a telescope, obscuring our view of the heavenly light; and again, and by the same means, sullying our own heart and "defiling our garments" (Rev. iii. 4). A spirit of worldliness, pride, self-seeking, or vain-glory may very easily creep in and at once bring an inward soil while it dims the spiritual sight; and sometimes we are very slow in finding this out. The only safeguard is continually to pray, with the

Psalmist, "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults" (Psalm xix. 12), and "See if there be any wicked way in me" (Psalm cxxxix. 24). We must especially ask Him to "cleanse" us from every form of self-deceit and blindness of heart.

Let us not complacently say, as some have done, "God will not judge us severely for sins of ignorance." The apostle did, indeed, obtain mercy for what he had done "in ignorance and unbelief." But none the less did it need cleansing. In the Levitical Law, even an accidental and unconscious defilement, such as touching a corpse unawares, required a sacrifice to purify the offender. We have the Fountain ever open "for sin and uncleanness;" but for all these things, even for a sin ignorantly fallen into, the cleansing is required.

Nothing will help us to "purify our souls in obeying the truth" (1 Peter i. 22) more surely than a deep sense of God's abhorrence of sin; but the prayer, "Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me," is one we may be sure will be answered; and the more we seek to "search and try our ways" (Lam. iii. 40), the clearer and brighter will our spiritual sight become.

"Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God."

There is no Christian grace more evidently lovely and desirable than this, even to the eye of the world ; and few that are more difficult to practise. Some young Christian persons, who are sincerely anxious to make peace among those with whom they live, if they see them at variance, try to do it by vehement efforts and much talking, which is more apt to have the effect of driving the contending parties, like those of whom the Psalmist complained, to "make themselves ready for battle."

And there is a kind of restless, interfering spirit we see in some really excellent persons, which seems to have a direct tendency (unconsciously to themselves) to "stir up strife."

In trying to be peacemakers, let it be our first aim to take care we are not *disturbers* of peace. *Peacekeeping* is often the first step towards peacemaking.

But the peacemaker's work can be done positively as well as negatively ; only it requires to be done, as an artist would say, with a light hand and a careful touch ; it is a work which is effected rather by unobtrusive tact and nice observation than by direct and visible efforts. Some of us may remember the one who is the peacemaking element in a family, it may be the daughter, or sister, or mother,—one who will be

careful not to awaken a combative spirit by long discussions or open rebukes, but will remind the disputants by a look or a sign, which is more attended to than many words would be, or who by a gentle word, a pleasant remark, a timely change of topics, will ward off irritation ; who by a little personal sacrifice, or a little pains in making some arrangement to keep apart those who jar against each other, or to amuse some difficult-tempered person or troublesome child, will continue to keep the domestic sky clear.

Do not let us despise these things, and say they are trifles not worth attention, or that others ought not to require such care. We are servants of Him who came into the world, not to be ministered to, but to minister, and it may be that the patient, unselfish Christian, much of whose life has to be given to such little cares, is pleasing the Lord to the full as truly as the founder of some great charity—perhaps more, if the spirit of the first is the more self-forgetting.

“But I have no tact or quickness of perception,” some one may say despondingly. Perhaps not by nature ; but grace can do much. “If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” Solomon asked for wisdom to govern a kingdom, and he was approved, for that was the work

God had given him to do. You are not given a kingdom to govern, but you have, perhaps, a family, or a school-room, or work-room, in which your influence can do something. Pray for a peacemaking spirit ; and, above all, seek for that constant communion with your Saviour, which will give you more power in this way than most people have any idea of.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake ; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Many young and ardent Christians are tempted to think that this beatitude can hardly be applied to our time and country. They almost wish, perhaps, in the fervour of their zeal, that they had lived when it was possible.

They think they would rather enjoy being called on to confess Christ at the stake or in the arena (these things generally looking rather easier at a distance than they would if viewed close at hand) ; but now in our days, when Christianity is established, and "religion walks in silver slippers," as John Bunyan would say, who can win the blessing promised to those persecuted for righteousness' sake?

Not exactly as in the days when the followers of the Gospel were openly persecuted, certainly. But trouble of some kind may meet a faithful

servant of Christ, as such, though in a form less definite and clearly acknowledged.

We shall probably be very seldom, if ever, exposed to trial directly or avowedly because of our religion. This is an age distinguished as liberal: and the most determined opponent of Christianity even, would not venture in our days at attack or injure his neighbour *only* because he was a Christian.

But there are many indirect ways in which a faithful believer may be exposed to trial and annoyance for the sake of his religion. Those who are really actuated by that secret animosity against true and earnest piety, which may be found among many who strictly follow the outward forms of religion, will find ways and means of making him suffer blame and loss under the pretext of some fault or deficiency. It is never difficult to trip up a solitary individual, if others are so disposed; perhaps some slight failure is made the most of; or if he stands in the relation of scholar to teacher or employed to employer, it is easy to criticise the work done or task performed, so as to make the defects stand out in the most glaring light, while the merits are lightly passed over—and even to do this in an apparently impartial manner.

Or they will say that it is not religion they

object to—it is an excellent thing in its own place ; but what they disapprove of is dogmatic intolerance, or fanaticism, or harshness of judgment. And thus real earnest Christians are accused of these faults—justly or unjustly—so that they seem to suffer blame, not “for righteousness’ sake,” but either for failure in their duties, or incompetency, or for something which would be *un*-righteous, if the accusation were deserved.

And the bitterness of this trial is enhanced by its not being avowed, or even always clear either to the sufferers themselves or to those who oppose them. “If it were distinctly and evidently for Christ’s sake, I could bear it,” the tried believer is ready to cry ; “but the uncertainty as to whether I am really suffering ‘for righteousness’ sake’ makes it so harassing. How then can I rejoice, as the words of our Lord bid me do ?”

Only by remembering that your Lord knows it all. He makes provision for the very thing that is troubling you now ; for He speaks of those who have “all manner of evil said against them *falsely*, for His Name’s sake ;” and He bids them, *then*, “rejoice and leap for joy.” And He never commands His servants to do anything which He does not enable them to do.

He never sends them to war at their own charges.

Only trust, and do not faint. But remember that the blessing is on those who are accused *falsely*. Take care it be not a true accusation. Watch and pray, and pray to be kept from giving *just* cause to others to blame you. It is true that Christians do sometimes glory in persecution that they have brought on themselves by their self-assertion and want of forbearance and meekness—or by the careless, half-hearted way in which they have done their work, “because it was only common, secular, every-day business, which did not signify.”

Never let the tempter whisper that deceit in your ear! *Everything* signifies, when the Name of your Master is at stake. The lessons to be learned, the work to be done, however humble, should be done to the very best of your power. You need wisdom in speaking, and patience and meekness in holding your peace. For all these things you must ask, and ask not once or twice, but constantly. Let your prayer be, “Lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies.”

Then if, after all your efforts, you have to bear unjust blame, accept it as “the reproach of Christ,” and thank Him for giving you something to bear for Him who bore so much for

you. But even then, take the cross humbly, rather than triumphantly; for many have stumbled and fallen on this rock, and been puffed up because they have been able to endure.

The only safeguard is to remember that you have no stock of grace laid up in yourselves to draw upon, but that you must go to God every time and ask for help. Your having been sustained twenty times is no security against your falling the twenty-first, if that one time you forget to look up to Him.

But then, look on the reward! Will not everything you have had to bear seem a trifle when once you meet His eye fixed approvingly on you? Try to look at things now as they will appear to you when you see them lighted up by the "full sunshine of His smile," and all will seem easy to do and to bear.

And lastly, as we cast our eye over this list of Christian graces, let us look for their perfect exemplification in Him who alone of all who ever lived on earth was perfect in humility, meekness, mercy, purity, peacemaking, righteousness, endurance. He who made for us a "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction," is also our perfect example. But till we have come to Him as a Saviour, we cannot even begin to tread in His steps: till we

have realized His work *for* us, the work *in* us cannot go on : but having entered by the door, and come to Him as "poor in spirit," we shall be enabled, by looking to Him for strength, to work in the power of the Spirit, and realize the fulness of the blessings He has promised.

CHAPTER IV.

POSITIVE PRECEPTS IN ECCLES. IX. AND COL. III. 14.

“**W**HATSOEVER thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.”

“Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord and not to men.”

Here we have a “positive” command given, first in the Old Testament, then in the New. The first time the precept is given by the wisest and most prosperous of Israel’s kings; the second time by the great Apostle of the Gentiles. The import of both is the same, and the very words differ but little.

To those who are naturally active and enterprising, to whom a life of inaction is the greatest of trials, such an exhortation may seem hardly needed, and they will quietly make it over to their friends and neighbours of a different turn.

But is it quite certain they may not find it equally applicable to themselves in some ways? Many of us are ready enough to "do with our might" things for which we have a natural inclination or aptitude; but the temptation is to neglect or carelessly attend to uncongenial occupations which may be no less duties to us.

The learned Bible student, if he is also a pastor, may find it hard to give himself to parish work or visiting; the girl who carries all the prizes at her school examinations may be inclined to neglect home-calls and commonplace family duties.

Harder still it is for those who are placed, as sometimes happens, in a position in which their principal work is one for which they are naturally unfitted—as when a studious but unpractical youth must toil in a house of business, or a girl of lively imagination but unskilful hands must give her chief time to household tasks. It is difficult to work well and heartily at something in which we know we can never attain anything beyond mediocrity, and in which self-complacency, the secret ally which so often unconsciously comes to our aid, is arrayed against us.

But to those so exercised, our precept will come as their help. It is not "what thy *will*

chooseth," but "what thy hand findeth." If, for the time, the "trivial round, the common task," is what your hand "finds," still you are to "do it with your might."

You are to put your will into what you are called to do, instead of setting your will against it. You are to give your best efforts to the task, however distasteful or wearisome, even though you may seem to yourself unsuccessful, and even be blamed by others for failures you cannot altogether help, and get scant credit for the imperfect success which was the best you could do: still, do not lose heart.

Remember to *whom* the Apostle said, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily." He spoke to those who had a harder lot than you or any in a free country can know—to slaves, often captives torn from country and friends—forced to spend life in trying to please a harsh or capricious master or mistress, or in toiling at some calling in which labour could never be sweetened by the common meed of honest toil.

Think what it must have been for those who were actually the *property* of others, to be called on to do their work heartily! Truly they could not have done it but for the motive which the Apostle gives in the same verse, "As unto the

Lord and not unto men ;” and he goes on, “ For ye serve the LORD CHRIST.”

There was the ray of light to brighten the dark prospect. It was to Christ and for Him they were to do their work. The Apostle well knew what mighty power love has to sweeten the hardest toil. The poor slave who met with none but harsh words and cold looks on earth, could look upwards with the eye of faith and see his Lord’s loving gaze fixed on him, and feel it was for Him he was working. Cannot you do the same ? Cannot you ennoble the humblest duties by remembering that they are done to please Him who spent the long years of His youth in the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth ?

But again, “ What thy hand findeth to do ’ is sometimes a little bit of useful service which, because it is humble and insignificant, is suffered to escape your notice.

Perhaps you are longing to go forth and labour in mission fields abroad, and the way is not open. There is a ragged school in which you might take a class which needs a teacher, or a flower mission in which you might help, but you think these things are too small, not worth attempting.

Or you are unable to take outdoor work, for some reason, but there is a little child at

home who could be influenced for good, or a helpful letter that could be written to one who might be comforted or roused ; but you do "not feel led" to such kind of things. Have you never asked yourself whether what you call "leading" from the Lord may not be rather the working of your own will? and whether, if you would simply and obediently wait on the Lord and take from His hands every opportunity He gives you for usefulness, you would not find blessed openings for service where you at first thought yourself utterly hedged in?

If *all* the hand finds to do, whether hand-work or head-work, everything that comes before us, were done thoroughly, as far as we can accomplish it, nothing "scrambled through" or done mechanically in a "perfunctory" way, but cheerfully and with the whole mind given to what we do—how much easier the work would become! how much lighter the burden!

There is a notable contrast between the reasons given in the two passages for our hearty work. The exhortations of the crowned monarch end with a tinge of sadness; those of the chained, lonely prisoner with a lighting up of joyful anticipation. Solomon could only remind us that there is "no device or knowledge

in the grave," so that now, and now only, is our time to work.

St. Paul looks beyond the grave, and bids his "hearers" work with the prospect of receiving the "reward of their inheritance." He saw the time when the "Well done, good and faithful servant!" would gladden the ears of all who had served faithfully "in a little," whether they had received the five or the two talents; when He whom they had followed on earth would make them "rulers" over "many things," when "His servants shall serve Him" freely, joyously, every faculty and power brought into place, every mystery which in this life had saddened them read aright in the light of His countenance.

CHAPTER V.

POSITIVE PRECEPTS IN PHIL. IV. 8.

AMONG the *positive* precepts or models set before us in the New Testament, scarcely any contain more in a few words than the verse which heads this chapter, where the believer is exhorted to think on "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."

Each word contains a store of thought ; let us try to examine each in detail.

To begin with the first clause, "Whatsoever things are true."

Truth may be regarded in two lights : First, the *real* as opposed to shadows, to unrealities, to vague uncertainty. This is truth of doctrine. Secondly, as opposed to falsehood and deceit ; this is truth in practice, in our dealings with each other. Both these come under the head of "whatsoever things are true."

And, first, Truth of doctrine. We all, "who call ourselves Christians," are ready to make our boast of holding the truth. But is it *as the truth* that we cling to it? Do we really love the Gospel because it is *the truth*? Have we always searched the Scriptures with an honest desire to know what they really teach, desiring (as has been well said) to be on the side of truth, and not merely to have truth on our side?

These two things are not as alike as they seem at first. It is one thing to desire the services of truth as a useful ally, and another to follow truth as a guide and rule—or rather to follow Him who is "the Truth." But our allegiance to Him cannot be separated from our allegiance to truth, for all truth is in Him.

There are many who hold true doctrine, but not because it is true, but because they have been accustomed to take all they have heard for granted without questioning,—many who have no better reason to give for being Christians than a Hindoo or Mohammedan for believing his sacred books,—many whose belief has been unquestioning, simply because they have never given themselves the trouble of thinking whether they really believe or no. And then, when they come in contact, as they are most likely to do at the present day, with those who have thrown away

all belief in the Scriptures, or who have overlaid them with vain ceremonies and superstitions, what is there to keep such unthinking so-called believers from being carried away in the vortex of "strange doctrines"?

But some will object, "We are not learned; we have no skill to enter the lists with infidels or with Romanists." No; but this is not asked of you. What is required of you is "to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." (1 Pet. iii. 15). The simplest, the weakest, and humblest believer may study the Scriptures intelligently, using all the helps he can procure, and praying for the Holy Spirit to guide him "into all truth" (John xvi. 13). So doing he may be sure that thus honestly and diligently searching the Scriptures, he will surely find, as the Bereans of old, that "these things are so" (Acts xvii. 11). And the more he studies, the more brightly and clearly will the truth shine forth.* "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous *runneth into it* and is safe" (Prov. xviii. 10). He will not find its

* I may be permitted to name the "Easy Lessons on the Evidences of Christianity," by my father, Archbishop Whately, as a small and inexpensive book, within the reach of all, and invaluable to those liable to be brought into contact with unbelievers.

strength or safety by standing outside ; but once *in*, he will find more and more how perfect are the proportions, how solid and firm the strength, of that wondrous edifice.

But the description, "Whatsoever things are *true*," includes also truth in all our dealings. And even among real Christians, this is often not thought of as it should be.

"Truth not thought of !" some will exclaim ; "as if we would ever dream of telling a lie !" No, not a direct lie, perhaps. The tempter is far too wise to present the gross, open form of deceit to those who have been brought up to dread it ; but he tries to lead them into gradual and almost imperceptible deviations from truth in daily life and conversation, which often end by having virtually the same effect.

How many of us have been tempted, for instance, especially under the influence of fear, to make false excuses for our conduct—to allege reasons for what we did and said which we knew full well were not our *real* reasons ; to say a thing which, though true in one sense, was not true in the sense in which we knew we should be understood by those to whom we spoke. And under this head, too, comes all that relates to what may be called *acting a lie* ; conveying a false impression by looks, acts, gestures, or even

silence. And this may sometimes involve a worse violation of truth than even a spoken lie.

Self-defence, dread of blame, this particularly among young people of a timid or sensitive nature, eager for the approbation of others, will often lead them into equivocations of this kind.

"But what is one to do?" an objector will ask. "Are we bound to tell our most hidden motives or innermost feelings to all the world, even at the risk of seriously hurting or offending others?"

No, we are not bound at all times to tell others exactly what we think; in many cases we could not do so without transgressing the law of kindness and love; but we can avoid saying what we know to be false. We can be silent; or if the occasion call for some remark, we may make some friendly observation, or express some kindly wish which we *ought* to be able to make sincerely.

And in the cases where our fear is, not of wounding another's feelings, but incurring blame, we can boldly resolve to face the pain if needful, and then tell the truth gently, humbly, but firmly. If we could only know it beforehand, we often meet the very evil we dreaded, and in a greater degree, by our want of courage in owning the truth. A confession made calmly and boldly,

but at the same time with courtesy and mildness, will often disarm the most irritable and impatient, where subterfuge and coaxing would only increase their anger.

But again, we are often led into untruthfulness by love of talking, or desire to tell something striking or amusing. This is a spirit of exaggeration, particularly common in the young, but from which great talkers of any age are seldom altogether free. It is in this way that the *spirit* of the Ninth Commandment, as before observed, is so often broken. We do not deliberately "bear false witness against our neighbour;" but we repeat things of him which we cannot certainly know to be true. A vague report is carried from one to another; a little is added by each; and the tale, which begun with being only slightly "coloured," ends by being false.

One thing which often fosters this evil habit is a loose, careless way of relating what we see and hear,—an early habit of inaccuracy indulged in till it is hardly possible to tell where truth ends and falsehood begins. Dr. Johnson truly said, "that a child should be checked for saying a thing took place at one window when it happened at the other." Those who have grown up in these careless habits of speech will be

inclined to think lightly of the evil. But it does indeed sap the foundations of truth.

On the other hand, it is a great mistake to speak of fictitious narratives as coming under the head of "untruths," as some good people do. A fictitious tale may *happen* to be silly or otherwise objectionable; but nothing can be correctly called an untruth, except *what professes to be true*; for this is what constitutes the essential character of falsehood.

And this is most important to keep in mind; for very often scruples in the wrong direction have a tendency to put one off one's guard just where the danger lies; and few are as much alive as they should be to the mischief of exaggerating and "colouring" a true narrative.

In missionary work this has done terrible harm. The workers in a mission are often painfully tempted by the injudicious eagerness of friends at home for interesting anecdotes and marked or tangible tokens of success, to say a little more than is true, or to magnify some trifling incident, or alter it slightly to give it a picturesque turn—or to put forward the bright side exclusively, and keep back the other—or, again, to make some statement which, not being fully explained, misleads the readers, and gives the impression of much greater success than is really the case.

Many, again, are tempted to be untruthful in the cause of their own party. It is difficult to define party spirit exactly: but it is clear that when once the attachment to a mission, a congregation, a religious community, or an association of any kind, leads us to think more of it than of God's cause generally, or so to identify it with that cause that all who "follow not with us" are condemned or ignored, as before observed; or if we are tempted to deviate from strict truthfulness and uprightness, though it be but a hair's-breadth, in order to forward our cause or to please those with whom we are associated, then, we may be very sure, party spirit has crept in, and we shall, if we do not sedulously watch, be led insensibly into deviating more and more widely from the straight path. If we get to love our own Church, or association, or mission, more than the truth, we shall find ourselves gradually loving it more than Christ, and end (as a great writer has well remarked), by loving ourselves more than either. From such a course may the good Lord deliver us! But we must beware of the first step—the allowing ourselves to swerve from truth and honesty ever so little, for the sake of the object we have at heart.

Better that the noblest work ever undertaken

by Christian labourers should perish, than that it should owe its continuance to the smallest compromise with evil. Better so, if it must be ; but it *need not* be. I believe no real work of God ever prospered by the workers allowing themselves, ever so little, to speak deceitfully for God.

These are but faint indications of trains of thought which each can best follow out for himself. But let us all seek prayerfully and watchfully to look to "whatsoever things are true."

We come next to "whatsoever things are *"honest"*—or, as it is rendered in the margin and now in Revised Version, "*venerable*"—and clearly the original word means not what we in modern English call "*honest*," but something to be revered and venerated.

The prevalent disposition among the young at the present day, as we have already observed, is deficiency in reverence, both in feeling and manner.

And the inclination, in those who are rightly and justly opposed to superstitious veneration for outward ceremonial, sacred places, etc., to rush to the opposite extreme of utter disregard to all externals, comes under the same head.

But more than this. We may find, even

among sincerely earnest Christians, a want of due consideration of the right manner of speaking of what we all hold as most sacred. There may be some reaction in this again. At one time it was regarded by many as needful to speak on all religious topics in a certain set tone and manner, as far removed as possible from the language of every-day life. This, of course, led to what is commonly called "*cant*;" and the epithet was not wholly unjust, for the essence of *cant* is looking to the outward form rather than the inner reality.

But are we not in danger, some of us, of falling into another kind of *cant* on the opposite side? Do not many Christians, especially young ones, get into the habit of using a kind of off-hand, colloquial way of speaking of sacred things, sometimes approaching what on other subjects we should call *slang*? Is not the Name which is above every other, and the sweetest "in the believer's ear," sometimes handled with irreverent familiarity?

It may be done by loving hearts in ignorance; but surely, as with parents, the truest and deepest love is that which is associated with reverence in tone and manner. The deepest currents are generally those which run still and calm; and though the enthusiastic joy of a

young believer may and will naturally burst out in fervid words, still this fervour should be combined with holy respect and veneration, if we would keep to the Apostle's precept.

Let us now look at the next clause, "Whatsoever things are *just*."

"That seems easy enough!" many will be ready to say. Not so. Justice is not only a higher virtue, but a more difficult one than we are apt to allow. It is very often thought less of than it should be by those who read in their Bibles that the character of God in His own Word is, "A JUST God and a Saviour," "just, and having salvation" (Isa. xlv. 21; Zech. ix. 9).

It is much easier to be kind, generous, or even self-denying, than strictly just. For justice requires not merely the exercise of an amiable impulse, but of reflection and principle. And yet without it we cannot really act up to the golden rule of kindness. For till we know how we OUGHT to wish others to act to us, we cannot know how to act to them; and this, it is clear, must be the meaning of "Do as ye would be done by," since to comply with unreasonable and unfair wishes would be no real kindness, but very much the contrary.

Justice requires patient and thoughtful weigh-

ing of both sides of a question, and readiness to put ourselves mentally in another's place. Many who have the care and direction of others placed under them are unjust from forgetting this precaution. They expect from pupils, or underworkers, or servants, what cannot fairly be expected of them; they forget to take into account their capabilities, their disposition, their previous training, and so, without intending it, they act unfairly and hardly by those they are directing or taking care of.

Again, in judging of the conduct of others, the most conscientious and high-minded persons are, curiously enough, often the most tempted to be unjust. They think, and rightly, that such and such conduct in *themselves* would be inexcusable and wicked, and they conclude that it must be the same with others; whereas bad early teaching, dulness of perception, or a morbid state of mind, perhaps the result of ill health of body, may lead many to do things very wrong in themselves, but which do not prove the doers of them to be as hopelessly bad as they would be in our own case. To be severe with ourselves and gentle with others, is no easy task: but this is what a Christian must be who seeks to think on "whatsoever things are just."

CHAPTER VI.

POSITIVE PRECEPTS IN PHIL. IV. 8

(continued).

“**W**HATSOEVER things are pure.” This is a delicate and difficult subject to handle, and perhaps is the best treated by looking on the things we are to strive after, rather than those we have to avoid. Our Lord Himself has said, “The pure in heart shall see God;” and like many other of His words, this can be taken both ways; for the more we are enabled by the Holy Spirit’s power, as before observed, to approach to “seeing God” with the enlightened eyes of our understanding, the more we shall become pure in heart. If we look on the brightness and purity of Christ, we shall shrink more and more from anything that can defile. By looking, we grow like; by growing like, we become more able to look.

And in proportion as the Christian Church is inwardly and outwardly pure, so will be her strength. “Fair as the moon, clear as the sun,

terrible as an army with banners,"—what a picture do those words convey of strength and purity combined, and of strength springing from purity !

One practical word of caution as to this subject. Dangers may be incurred quite unwittingly, by the young especially, by forgetting that work which it is quite needful should be done, may not be the right work for *them* to do, and may bring them into contact with influences and scenes which it is safest for them to avoid.

Those who are *really called* to such work may confidently look to the Lord to preserve and guide them, but it was only when Peter was bidden by the Lord to come to Him on the troubled waters that he had a right to count on the Divine power to hold him up from sinking. Do the foul waters of human sin and misery need less watchful precaution ?

But we have to proceed to examine "whatsoever things are lovely." In our modern speech we have got accustomed to use the word almost exclusively for *outward* graces and attractions ; but the original word would be better rendered "lovable," or as the Germans would express it, "lovely," that which naturally and fitly wins affection.

And how wide a range this takes in !

Many Christians, sincerely desirous of doing right, and in their own way truly devoted and self-denying, are forgetful of cultivating all that comes under the head "lovely." Perhaps one reason is, that the things to be so classed are generally very *little* things ; and we forget how large a share these little things have in the happiness or misery of life, and how mighty a work they may do in influencing others for good or for evil.

For example, courtesy and gentleness of manner. It is possible to be truly benevolent, to give not only freely of our substance, but of our time and thought to those in need, and yet almost to neutralise the good effect of it all by a harsh, or cold, or abrupt manner. Many visitors to the poor allow themselves to speak to those whom they really wish to help in a rough, or haughty, or fault-finding and dictatorial tone, which gives more annoyance than their gifts can give pleasure.

Our Anglo-Saxon race, it has often been remarked, does not possess a natural gift of good manners. They have to be learned by us, whereas, in some races, far behind us in civilization, a graceful courtesy seems instinctive. But we can learn thoroughly whatever we set our mind to do, and well-educated persons

rarely fail in good breeding in the ordinary intercourse of society. Where too many fail is in speaking to those whom they regard as inferiors, or to strangers whom they have no particular desire to please.

And thus in travelling, for example, we may sometimes meet with instances of very scant courtesy from persons whose manners would probably be irreproachable in their own circle of acquaintance. But when they are off their guard, and not, as children would say, "on their good behaviour," they will act as if they had put up their good manners with their best attire, and thought anything would pass muster with strangers!

"But surely no real Christian would act so?" Yes, real Christians even, as well as others, if they do not remember to bring their Christianity to bear on these little things as well as great ones.

One of the most perfect specimens of a "Christian gentleman" I ever knew, was one of whom it was remarked that his manner was as courteous and urbane to the poorest fruit-seller at the corner of the street, as to the highest lord in the land. He was not one to speak much. His efforts to do good were indefatigable and persevering, but quiet and unobtrusive;

but the influence he exerted during a residence for health on the Continent was felt by persons of all ranks and nationalities, long after he had been taken to his heavenly rest. His name is still remembered with affectionate respect where he sojourned ; and one great secret of his Christian power was his attention to "Whatsoever things are lovely."

And how often the want of this is felt in family circles ! Parents will repel the children they devotedly love by a cold, hard manner ; brothers and sisters cause each other continual pain by rough, careless, teasing words. Their affection for one another is deep and true, but their forgetfulness of the things which are "lovely " often puts affection to a severe test.

And not only unlovely words and acts, but want of thoughtfulness in little things, will come under the same head, as breaking through the Apostle's precept. We do not half take account of the power of little acts of kindness and thoughtfulness, and little services quietly rendered, in winning hearts.

And then, again, all that comes under the head of "tact." Some people in advising, exhorting, or trying to console, contrive to produce the effect of awkward fingers laid roughly on a tender part, wounding instead of healing ; and

the harm done is more than that of mere pain. An ill-judged word, or a cold rebuff, will often leave a sting which may re-act in a lasting prejudice against "religious people," and the religion they profess.

Again, the failure is sometimes negative. There are people who do not think it "worth while" to write a sympathizing letter or speak a kindly word to friends in sorrow, "because, of course, they must know I am sorry for them."

They may know it, but very often the assurance is a real comfort. How often is a seasonable word of sympathy written or spoken, or even a look, or a hand-pressure, truly "a cup of cold water" to the tried sufferer! How precious such ministrations may be, those know who have proved them; why should those who desire to follow our Lord's footsteps be backward in offering them?

We might learn it from what one has called the "beautiful *little* things" in His life. In the midst of that life, so full of labour, these fine touches were never overlooked. The babes brought to Him might have been blessed without His adding a loving caress to the blessing. The dead youth might have been raised without the tender word of comfort to the mother, and the little maiden without the kindly familiar

"*Talitha cumi*," the household word by which her mother might have roused her from sleep. He might have left it to her parents to see that she was revived with needful food. But He, with a world to save, found time to think of those things that are "lovely." Shall we not do likewise?

Perhaps we may feel that we are not gifted as some are with natural grace or sweetness of manner. Let us, then, ask God to give it us. We can ask confidently for everything which He has commanded us to do. *For the commands are only promises turned the other way*; and in this, as in other things, how often it is that "we have not because we ask not."

And "Whatsoever things are of good report." This seems to sum up all we have been considering separately, and to view them specially in respect to the impressions they will make on others. We are to take care there shall be no *just* cause for the world saying, "These religious people are no better than their neighbours." That they *will* say it, whenever they observe inconsistent conduct in one professing piety, is very certain. We cannot measure the harm done by these failures in Christian men and women. One single instance of what, alas! we have seen so much of late—of want of straight-

forwardness, for example, in business concerns, will do more to hinder the progress of the Gospel than the most devoted Christian efforts could do to forward it. And let us not think we are safe because we have been mercifully preserved from temptation to such glaring sins. Little acts of selfishness, or unkindness, or meanness, or bad-temper, will be watched and registered against us long after we have forgotten them.

Let our daily prayer be:—"Let not those who trust in Thee be ashamed for my sake, O Lord," and "Lead me in the right way because of mine enemies" (margin, *observers*). And let us keep our eyes continually on that gracious Saviour, in whom all things true, venerable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report were found in their perfection, and whose will is to "purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." So praying, and so looking, we shall be enabled "to keep a conscience void of offence, and to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

CHAPTER VII.

POSITIVE PRECEPTS IN 1 THESS. V. 16—23.

HERE we have another set of Positive Precepts which may throw a new "light on our path." The Apostle has been exhorting his beloved Thessalonian converts to be "ready" for the coming of the Lord, putting on the Christian armour, of which he had written more fully in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and seeking to encourage one another in brotherly love. Then follows a series of short and concise precepts, each full of meaning. Let us take them one by one, and consider them more closely.

"Rejoice evermore" is the first note sounded; and the same was written to the Philippians later, from Rome, when the hand that penned it was *chained*. What a lesson for Christians!

But many will say, "How can we carry out this precept when we are bowed down with some crushing sorrow, or tortured with intense anxiety, or suffering under sickness which affects

the mental as well as bodily state? When nerves are unstrung and the poor weak frame prostrated by pain or languor, we may meekly *endure*, but how is joy possible?"

But such persons mistake the meaning of the Apostle's precept. "Rejoicing" cannot mean being always in a state of exultant jubilation of spirits: St. Paul himself speaks of writing "with much affliction and anguish, with many tears" (2 Cor. ii. 4); and St. Peter tells his converts "that if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold tribulation" (1 Peter i. 7).

The joy spoken of, then, must be consistent with occasional "affliction" and "heaviness," "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." What the Apostle clearly means, is that the believer should remember at all times and keep in mind that however sorely tried, he has a source of rejoicing which can never be taken away; that the sense of being pardoned and accepted in Christ, loved with an everlasting love, and an heir of unspeakable future bliss, is a blessing he would not exchange for all the joys of the happiest life on earth.

And the more this is realized, the deeper and fuller the under current of real comfort and blessing, the more frequently it will rise to the surface, even in the midst of trouble,

We must not write bitter things against ourselves for mourning when in affliction ; but neither must we allow sadness to take possession of our minds as if we had no hope in the future.

It has been observed that "love is the sweetness of the fruit, joy the colour." The sweetness and colour of fruits go together, in general ; and both depend mainly on the fruit growing in the sunshine. If we desire to grow in love and joy, let us seek to dwell in the sunshine of Christ's presence.

"Pray without ceasing: in everything give thanks." To "rejoice evermore" rightly, we must also carry out the next precept, "Pray without ceasing." It is the praying Christian who will ever be the rejoicing one. But what is "unceasing prayer" ? Literally, it could not be carried out on this earth. Many sincere but unenlightened persons have tried to compass it by prayers fixed for so many times in the day, or relays of worshippers in perpetual adoration, or "contemplative orders," whose prayers should make up for the deficiencies of others. But all these are attempts quite wide of the mark, and commonly end, as all such attempts do, in mere formalism. To "pray without ceasing," is simply to bring the spirit of prayer into our

daily life ; to make prayer part of our life-work, knitting earth to heaven, as has been well remarked, "by a golden chain of supplications and heavenward thoughts." It is to bring our daily tasks, our letters, whatever work we have in hand, to the Lord for His blessing—to seek wisdom from Him, like Nehemiah before the King, in a secret "cry to Him," in all our dealings with others—to lay all our cares and perplexities at His feet, and encounter all difficulties, great or small, with the weapon of "all-prayer," and accompany it with "giving of thanks." "In everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*." Never let us forget to unite our prayer with thanks for prayer answered—with remembrance of the lovingkindness which has been "ever with us,"—"counting up our mercies." How often is the comparatively prosperous Christian put to shame by the thankfulness of some afflicted sufferer who was more ready to praise for small alleviations than most others for unnumbered blessings! Let us see that we are ready to act on the words of the Psalmist, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me." It was when Jehoshaphat and his army "began to sing and praise," that the Lord put their enemies to flight.

The two next warnings appear closely con-

nected, "Quench not the Spirit," and "Despise not prophesyings." At the time they were written, the infant Christian Church was ministered to by some who were endowed with visible gifts of the Spirit, and "prophecy" was one of those gifts. The Apostles could speak with authority as the "oracles of God." But *we* have no infallible mode of judging whether Christian teachers are speaking by the distinct and direct power of the Holy Ghost, or of themselves. For though we cannot doubt that the promised help of that Blessed Spirit is granted to all true Christians, both in their daily lives and in teaching others, still we are not given the power of distinguishing between the thoughts inspired by the Holy Ghost and the movements of the human mind, either in ourselves or others. We can only test the work by its fruits, in conduct, and by its conformity to the standard of Scripture, in teaching and preaching.

The most practical way, then, of using the Apostle's warning now, is in watching against the ways of "quenching the Spirit" in *ourselves*. We may be very sure that any movement of the soul which leads us to prayer, not formal, but earnest and real,—to a desire to study the Word of God,—to a longing to win others to Christ,—to a humbling sense of sin and desire for

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personal holiness—*must* be the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, for human nature, unrenewed, could never prompt such desires ; and if we neglect to listen to such inward promptings, we are surely and truly “quenching the Spirit.” And every time we so resist His pleadings, we make the right path harder and the wrong easier. We need, indeed, to beware of so striving against the Lord.

And to us, in our day, “prophesying” is the Word of God as given us in the Scriptures. This is our only true oracle and reliable spiritual guide. To undervalue that Word, to neglect its study, or to cavil against or try to explain its plain and clear declarations, is to “despise prophesyings.”

The next direction is to “Prove all things ;” and this again is linked to the former. For the sure test of any doctrine (and this is what seems to be alluded to specially) must ever be its being conformable to the Scriptures ; and we must bring to that standard everything which human teachers propose for our belief, and “hold fast that which is good.” When once we have been fully convinced that what we have been testing is truly in harmony with God’s Word, let us keep to it, and not allow ourselves to be “blown about with every wind

of doctrine," or influenced by the last speaker. To be open to conviction is one thing—to be vacillating and fickle is another.

And lastly, "Abstain from all *appearance*," or as it would be more correctly rendered, "all *forms*" of evil. (See *Revised Version*.) We are to watch against the various ways in which the enemy of our souls can take us in his snares. These snares are not the same in all times or places. One of the principal in our own days—outside of ourselves—is in the shape of dangerous *books*. Often we find infidel views covertly inculcated where they are not professed. We might be prepared for the enemy in open field, but here we have him lying in ambush, in various departments of literature, in reviews, tales, poems, essays—disguised under a colouring of noble and elevated sentiments, or earnest searching for truth, or hidden behind some interesting inquiry into the wonders of nature, the most elevating and improving of studies when made in a right spirit.

What is our safeguard? Not shunning intellectual pursuits; that is the monastic, not the New Testament form of Christianity. Our only true preservative is watchfulness and prayer, that we may be kept at all times loyal and faithful subjects of our King. What is

needed is the single eye, the honest heart, which will most surely detect the covert sneer or unbelieving suggestion. It is the sheep who follow Christ most closely who will be the readiest to shun "the voice of strangers."

But we must not neglect outward precautions. If we allow ourselves habitually to tamper with really anti-Christian writers, unless we are so circumstanced as to be called on to answer them, or to help others in defending their faith, we run the risk of injuring ourselves. Those called by God to meet the enemy in the field, may look confidently to Him to strengthen them; but, as was observed in reference to another class of dangers, it is only when going where He leads us, that we can expect to be so helped.

The same may be said of those writers who, in other ways, put "evil for good, and good for evil;" "darkness for light, and light for darkness." Many do this in respect of moral questions, as in religious ones, covertly and under the disguise of high pretensions. But if we find that any work, however fascinating, presents us with poison in this form, our only safe course is resolutely to turn away from it, and cleave to such things as are "pure, lovely, and of good report."

And to all who thus seek to act up to the spirit of this series of precepts, the concluding prayer of the Apostle will be answered—"The God of peace sanctify you wholly."

He who came to "save His people from their sins," will assuredly deliver them from the *power* as well as guilt of sin. But some who acknowledge this in words, act as if they disbelieved it, by contentedly acquiescing in besetting faults, as if they were incurable maladies to be endured with sorrowful resignation, instead of foes to be combated to the death. It is not in this spirit that we can look to the fulfilment of the Apostle's prayer. There is far too much tendency among Christians to forget what is forcibly expressed in a seldom-quoted verse of an otherwise well-known hymn—*

"But know—nor of the terms complain,
Where Jesus comes, He comes to reign—
To reign, and with no partial sway;
Thoughts must be slain that disobey."

Thoughts—not only words and actions. The poisonous stream must be tracked to its fountain-head and stopped there. And how? Not by

* The one beginning—

"Behold, a stranger at the door,
Who gently knocks, has knocked before," etc.

vehement efforts in our own strength ; but by crying to the Lord to fight for us and in us—by seeking to bring the power from on high to bear on every detail of our life, every part of our character. If a single spot is left unguarded, uninfluenced by this power, that undefended part will surely become a mark for the enemy. It is in this way that some are betrayed, and fail on what is naturally their *strong* point, just as a fortress has been scaled on the side on which it appeared impregnable, as Abraham, the Father of the faithful, failed in faith, and Moses, the meekest of men, in meekness. No side must be left open to attack ; but neither must we let our hearts fail in the fight. If we *expect* defeat, we may find that according to our unbelief it has come true.

But neither, again, must we let ourselves be carried away by the no less dangerous tendency on the other side, to believe that the sanctifying power of the Spirit will place the Christian, in this life, on a pinnacle of sinless perfection. The apostle John has told us that “ if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,” and “ if we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar ” (1 John i. 8).

We have no warrant for expecting that we should ever, while on earth, be out of reach of

the need of daily using the language of the Psalmist,* "Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse Thou me from my secret faults."

Only He who searches the heart can really tell how far any of its movements are unmixed with sin. If we try to map out our own progress, and give ourselves a "certificate" of exemption from all wrong-doing, we generally end by bringing down God's standard of holiness to meet our deficiencies, instead of ourselves rising to meet that standard. We can never safely try to get beyond the experience of the Apostle, "I know nothing by (or against) myself, yet am I not hereby justified, but He that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. iv. 4).

This does not imply "walking uncertainly," in perpetual harassing doubt and anxiety. But we must be willing that the Lord should carry out His full work in us as well as for us, and desire to "offer ourselves as a living sacrifice" to Him, and then He will assuredly "perfect that which concerneth us."

But we must leave it to Him to judge of the progress of His own work, and never dare to gauge our own attainments. We must look well that we are not enticed by any device of Satan, either in the shape of faithless despondency or

* Psalm xix., Prayer-Book Version.

presumptuous security, into relaxing our watchfulness and our devotedness to Him.

So may we confidently, though humbly, look for the fulfilment of the promise with which the exhortation and prayer of the chapter before us ends—"Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

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